Confirming Truth in Capote’s:

*In Cold Blood*

A Narratological Analysis of Autobiographical Elements

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Abstract

In 1959, Capote’s nonfiction novel entitled, *In Cold Blood* was written using artistic methods related to fictional writing. In consciously writing in this manner, Capote revealed a controversial shift away from a more objectivity based, journalistic truth, prevalent at the time. By using these methods to portray in particular Perry Smith, Capote has provoked doubts surrounding his commitment to “truth” within the book.

Using a narratological analysis of certain significant passages of the book, Capote’s presence and a notable relation he has to Perry is implied and brought to the forefront. In turn, this essay looks through these passages from the perspective of the genre of autobiography. From this viewpoint, how the reader is able to uncover Capote’s “intentions” by identifying with and presenting himself through Perry in the narrative, is discussed.

This essay concludes with the claim that due to Capote’s use of these artistic methods, the reader is provided with an autobiographical dimension to the narrative. Consequently, the essay claims that it is because such autobiographical dimensions are described by Linda Anderson (in her book *Autobiography*) as having an “honest intention which then guarantees the truth of the writing” (3), that Truman Capote’s “true account of a multiple murder and its consequences”, [own emphasis added] should thus be justifiable, and in his way, honestly true.
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1. Introduction

The nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* (henceforth abbreviated as *ICB*) was written by Truman Capote, about the murder of the Clutter family that took place on the 15th November 1959. Capote was inspired to write what is subtitled as “a true account of a multiple murder and its consequences”, after reading an article of the murders in the New York Times. The work for the book took part over a five year period, and contained an artistic and detailed account of the actions and thoughts of the murderers and of the town’s people. Capote also included detailed accounts of the police investigation and court procedures in Holcomb, Kansas pertaining to the deaths.

Capote’s research for the book was undertaken by using journalistic techniques that would not necessarily concur with contemporary journalism. Through the use of the journalistic technique of immersion, his ambition drove him toward producing work that meant a shift away from the more “objective” methods that were prevalently in use by journalists of the time. This meant, in short, that Capote’s *ICB*, not unlike Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* and Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, was to follow an urge that has its roots in the 1890’s.¹ With this book, Capote sought to re-determine what John Berger called the, “relation between the teller, listener (spectator) and protagonist (s)” (qtd. in Hartsock 51). In this way Capote incorporated literary techniques that enhanced his storytelling. He sought, through effective storytelling and a definitive writing style, to give the reader the feeling that the “teller, listener and protagonist” were linked. As such, *ICB* characteristically demonstrates that through

using this technique, Capote was brought emotionally closer to his subject and indeed
closer than a journalist dedicated to objectivity might otherwise have been. Not only did
this immersive journalism denote a distinctive, atmospheric and artistic approach in his
book, but Capote’s narrative style adhered to (what he considered to have invented) the
so-called genre of “Literary Journalism”. Tom Wolfe, a contemporary of Capote, defined
this new style as, “Reporting that read like fiction” (qtd. in Connery 3).

The striking outcome of this new form of writing is Capote’s indulgence within
his writing within the book, of a controversial use of creative fictional license. Whilst in
the one sense constricted somewhat by the dedication to a journalistic objective truth
within the nonfiction aspect of the book, this fictional license is set free through an
imaginative aspect of the genre. Through reading *ICB*, this controversial use of creative
fictional licence is most apparent within the portrayal of Perry.

As the book’s obvious protagonist, Perry is given a great deal more attention than
other characters in the book. Capote, however, takes this characterisation one step further
and uses a style of writing that reveals what could be seen as an indirect superimposition
of his persona on to Perry’s character within the book. As a result, whose story is being
told and who the focaliser is, is somewhat open to interpretation. It is greatly due to the
nature of this superimposition that critics have sought to deduce an inherent
problematical dichotomy in the book. In particular, in highlighting Capote’s bias in the
narrative, critics attack the claim that Capote makes in the subtitle of the book, “a true
account”. For example, Heyne blemishes Capote’s truth claim in *ICB*, by stating that,
“Capote sentimentaliz[es] his protagonist” (482). Tomkins too claims, “that Capote put
his own observations into the mouths and minds of other characters, and at the worst he created a mixed-up, inaccurate portrait of the murderer Perry Smith” (qtd. in Heyne 481).

Interestingly however, what this indirect criticism of Capote’s manipulation of Berger’s “relation between the teller, listener (spectator) and protagonist (s)” exposes is indeed, a very strong connection to the concept of Phillip Lejeune’s, “teller – listener – protagonist – relationship” indicated within Linda Anderson’s discussion of autobiography within narrative (2). As a result, there is a strong argument for discussing the autobiographical nature of Capote’s intentions behind Perry’s portrayal. The discussion behind the inherent level of bias behind Capote’s writing does not stop however, with the likes of critics such as Tomkins or Heyne. Buchanon and Tollison have this to say on the matter of motivation (or intention) within autobiography:

Once this motivation is so much as acknowledged, there is a directional bias in the narrative, a bias toward that constructed life that the autobiographer wants others to see as he ‘really’ was. The truth of autobiography must, at least in this sense, be defeated by its purpose. (509)

It is the intention of this essay nevertheless, to turn Buchanon and Tollison’s criticism on to its back, by claiming that it is the very nature of bias in the narrative that provides the foundations of truth in Capote’s claim. The essay will discuss these intentions by taking into consideration the insights gained from the narratological analysis, which focuses on the “teller, spectator and protagonist”. From this analysis, the essay claims that it is through the autobiographical nature of Capote’s writing, that Capote can indeed be substantiated in his claim that, “In Cold Blood [is] a “true” account of a multiple murder and its consequences”[own emphasis].
In order to reach this goal, this essay is divided up into four sections. The first section; “Defining the term “Narratology”, will discuss the theory surrounding Gérard Genette’s work on narratology. In the second section; “Explaining and justifying the autobiographical concept”, the concept of Autobiography is discussed by highlighting the theory behind Anderson’s ideas of identity, intentionality, and the relationship between author, narrator and the protagonist. The third section; “Elements of Autobiography in the narrative”, reveals these elements by discussing the significant narratological sections in the book related to the presence of “Capote”2, “Capote’s” identification with, and identity through, the protagonist in the narrative; Perry. In the “Conclusion” section, the essay will draw together the most pertinent points from the previous section and offer suggestions for future analysis of *ICB*.

It is hoped thus that this essay will provide more of a concrete rationalisation behind Capote’s style, and drive the reader closer to a more adequate conclusive opinion of Capote’s truth claim. This, rationalisation however cannot be done until the main terms are explained, the process of which occurs below.

2. **Defining the term “Narratology”**

According to Peter Barry’s perception of structuralist theory, “things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are a part of” (Peter Barry 39). Therefore, to understand Capote’s intentions and sense of identity, previously commented in the introduction, and substantiate Capote’s truth claim, it is important to look deeper into *ICB*’s narrative. This is to be done by analysing what

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2 The use of quotation marks around “Capote” are used to distinguish the character as interpreted within the text of *ICB* whereas the use of Capote without quotation marks denotes the author and historical person.
Barry calls the “larger structures”. Capote’s views are not explicitly present in the book, so it is through looking deeper into the text from a more grammatical, stylistic and semantical standpoint, rather than a content-based analysis in the first instance, that narratological analysis plays its part.

As stated, this essay cannot search for a greater understanding of *ICB* through analysing purely what Capote writes because there is no explicit viewpoint of the author. A natural step therefore is to look deeper into the text through the analytical eyes of a linguistic theorist. As a result, an aim of the essay is to, “show how the technical linguistic features of a literary work, such as the grammatical structure of its sentences contribute to its overall meanings and effects” (Barry 203). With this aim, this form of analysis has strong connections to stylistics which in turn could be classified as a close relative of narratology. Nevertheless, the work on the particular form of narratology embraced by Gérard Genette (whose focus was as mentioned earlier) which is, “not [on] the tale itself so to speak, but how it is told, which is to say the act of telling itself” [own emphasis] (231), takes the analyst to the form of close reading required to fulfil the aim.

In the book *Narrative Discourse*, Genette considers how a story is told from various different angles. This essay focuses upon three of them. Firstly, Genette discusses the idea of mimesis; which dramatises the narrative through telling the story slowly, uses direct speech and constructs the scene, giving the reader the feeling that they experience everything described to them (231). In contrast rather, diegesis simply provides the reader with a summary where the writer says what happens rather than describing something as it happens (231). Capote uses both techniques in the book with varying effects, but essentially allows the reader to experience more explicitly the change
of pace of the text. Genette moves on to discuss focalisation which he describes as the “viewpoint or perspective” (232). Focalisation according to him is essentially divided into two parts; external and internal focalisation (232). Where the narrative describes what the characters say and do in the narrative, Genette classifies the action as external focalisation, whereas a description of what the character feels is said to be internal focalisation (233). As a literary journalist, Capote uses both forms of focalisation in *ICB* and whilst he on one hand has the ability to write what the characters have said and done, also writes (characteristically of literary journalism) about how they feel. It is here where (through the significant focalisation of Perry’s thoughts and feelings in the book) this essay recognises an element of bias in the writing. It is thus often through Perry, that views and intentions of Capote the author come through and a sense of shared identity with Capote is revealed.

Genette would also classify Capote as an effaced narrator in one sense due to the fact that he does not reveal his presence as a “true voice” or distinct character in the book (234). Nevertheless, as previously stated, due to the nature of Capote’s narration, there is indeed a very strong ghost-like presence of what Genette calls an “authorial persona” (234) exposed in the text. Finally, Capote chooses to use to great effect, the range of “representations of speech in [his] narrative” (239) between adding and omitting tagging, as a signification of his movement in an out of the narrative. Free indirect speech and direct speech (238) are also definitely favourites of speech representation for Capote.

Again, these notions serve the purpose of this essay well, because one already knows that critics have vehemently questioned the reliability of what Capote has written and in order to establish the authenticity of Capote’s “truth claim,” how Capote writes
becomes all the more important. Narratology therefore, is the “tool” so to speak, that the essay uses to bring to the surface Capote’s presence, intentions and identity with Perry within the text.

3. Explaining and justifying the autobiographical concept

From a narratological analysis, the reader is given the impression that “Capote” hides behind the narrative text throughout *ICB*. Such intentions have already been established by Tomkins and Heyne as somewhat injuring Capote’s claim to truth. This section will however discuss how, through an understanding of autobiographical perspective, one can get closer to justifying what Anderson notes as “honest intention which then guarantees the truth of the writing” (2-3).

The plight of the genre of autobiography is that it is characteristically difficult to define; as Olney comments: “One never knows where or how to take hold of autobiography: there are simply no general rules available to the critic” (3). Candace Lang does not either shed any more light on the definition of autobiography when commenting that: “Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it” (quoted in Anderson 1). It is due to the genre’s ambiguity that this essay pins down the term Autobiography from just one perspective; that is, Linda Anderson’s perspective.

According to Lang: (qtd. in Anderson 2-3) “if the writer is always in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical depending on how one reads it” (1). By looking even prior to the book’s authorial text, the paratext of the acknowledgements steers and colours how the reader should consider reading the book. As Capote writes in the acknowledgements of *ICB*: “All the material in this book not derived from my own observation is either taken from official records or is
the result of interviews”. Whilst Capote himself is not present in the authorial text, with this paratext it is known from the outset that it is he that has decided upon which material to add, which observations to reflect upon and how that material should be portrayed. This idea is reflected in Anderson’s book as, “…the belief that the author is behind the text. Controlling its meaning; the author becomes the guarantor of the ‘intentional’ meaning or truth of the text, and reading a text therefore leads back to the author as origin” (2).

In effect, what Capote does within the acknowledgements and indeed the subtitle of the book “A true account of a multiple murder and its consequences” (my own emphasis) is to thus reveal an “intention” already from the onset which, as such, is commonly reflected within autobiographical work. As Lejeune points out, the dimension of intentionality, “…provides the crucial link of identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist” (qtd. in Anderson 2). This link thus takes us closer to an autobiographical definition and awareness of autobiographical elements. Contra to this point Buchanon and Tollison’s previous comment from this essay’s introduction claims that it is the very nature of this intentional and motivational dimension that “creates a bias” which in turn defeats the very truth of autobiography. Indeed with the idea that Capote controls and manoeuvres the narrative in his direction, it is not at all difficult to understand Buchanon and Tollinson’s argument. Nevertheless, what seems to have a level of agreement in discussions within autobiography is that the narrative content (such as it is in ICB) has, through Capote’s proclamation, been provided with the principle stamp of autobiographical honesty to truth. However it is still in some respects difficult to support Capote’s honesty to truth when as according to Russell,
To thus ‘manage’ information so as to mislead readers would be . . . a decision that can lead an artist to the truth of his own vision . . . Paul Eakin takes up the need for fiction to inform vision, stating ‘it can have for the autobiographer the status of remembered fact.’ He means that the author’s cognition – the supervision agency in his consciousness – will often depend on fiction re-creation.

(416)

What Russell says here implies that Capote the autobiographer shapes the material and re-creates fictional elements in the book, to serve his vision of the truth which indeed can mislead the reader who is expecting a dedication to fact.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Capote’s dedication to truth is not necessarily flawed due to fictionalisation or steering of, for example Perry’s character, but rather that such an artistic portrayal from the context of autobiography can be justified as being Capote’s own honest truth. Rather than placing weight behind Capote’s claim of having written an, “... immaculately factual book...” (Plimpton qtd. in Heyne 481) it would be pertinent rather, within the context of autobiography and Capote’s point of view, to possibly class the book as immaculately truthful.

What follows, are interpretations of the narrative of the book that suggest which elements guide the reader to a form of truth that Anderson classifies as an “honest intention which then guarantees the truth of the writing” (3)

4. Elements of Autobiography in the Narrative

Through reading the book, Perry’s portrayal is in a sense touched with an evanescent brush of “Capote’s” own emotional and socio-political intentions. To harp back to Lejeune: there is a dimension of intentionality that “provides the crucial link of identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist”. Much of what Perry is denoted as
saying, experiencing or thinking, can thus be replaced with (as discussed within the discussion of autobiography) “Capote’s” underlining signature. Where in the book this signature is most felt will now be the content of this section of the essay.

How Perry’s portrayal is autobiographically “touched,” can indeed be seen through a narratological analysis of some of the key moments of the text. In one of the first key moments, the reader is provided with a vivid, metaphorically romantic impression of Perry; a depiction of his physical appearance, presented from an externally focalised perspective:

Sitting he had seemed more than a normal sized man, a powerful man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick crouching torso of a weightlifter…But some sections of him were not in proportion to others. His tiny feet encased in short black boots…he was no taller than a twelve year old child, and suddenly looked, strutting on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported, not unlike a well-built truck driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound. (Capote 15)

As a result of this very descriptive externally focussed technique, the reader is not only given the sensation of being distanced from Perry, but at the same time one feels like one is staring at him as if he were a caged animal. By using such a distancing technique, the narrative reveals a possible “intention” by “Capote” to dramatise Perry as society’s picture of a “monster–like” figure. The intention in this instance is for the reader to understand that society considers such a distance necessary to be safe from the harm that “inhuman beings” like Perry cause. At the same time, by utilizing that distancing technique as a symbol that depicts Perry’s victimization, society’s means of dealing with
Perry is condemned. “Capote” denounces society’s decision to hang Perry; an action which portrays a decision by society to distance itself from the concern instead of getting closer to him and understanding him which in effect causes the problems his debauched lifestyle causes. Portraying Perry as a monster emphasises further “Capote’s” sceptical view that society can also draw on a classical recognisable physical distortion that justifies disassociation from Perry and his impiety. This view of Perry as a monster is emphasised within the second impression one could get of this passage which is that the narrative’s description of Perry reads very much like a fairytale.

It can be supposed that Perry is narrated from the perspective of a traditional story teller’s fairy tale “beast” whose character is often misunderstood or judged. This misunderstood monster character, is developed again as Perry is depicted as a “twelve year old child”. Add this paternal depiction of innocence with “short legs” and “tiny feet” to him being a monstrosity with legs that are disproportionate to his upper “overblown” body and the reader is left with the feeling that the true Perry is someone that is misplaced. For whatever atrocity, punishment, or judgemental impression, connected to the atrocity that follows him, the reader is meant to feel that this picture does not match the child that Perry (according to “Capote”) visually represents. In other words, Perry is depicted as being an “unlikely criminal”. From such a representation of Perry, the reader is put on the defensive and deterred from wrongly judging Perry with abjuration, as (according to “Capote”) a society stereotypically would do, of monsters with physical deformities that perform inhumane actions.

Considering the effect that the somewhat conflicting depiction of Perry has on the interpretations of “Capote’s” intentions here, it is not impossible to relate to an
inspirational interpretation of the narrative and “Capote’s” life, given by writer Dan Futterman and director Bennett Miller’s in the biopic film, Capote (2005). In the film “Truman Capote” is given to say: “If I leave here without understanding you, the world will see you as a monster” (Capote). If one were to Juxtapose this vivid interpretation of “Capote’s” implied intentions from the film, with the character description in ICB, what the reader senses is a clear statement which considers the possibility that “Capote’s” wanted to depict the “deeper Human question” (Capote 43). The “deeper” question in this instance could be represented as an element of association within the autobiographical representation of identification that Capote has had with Perry. After all, the significance of their physical similarities cannot be overlooked. For example, as Garson comments: ”Capote [was] very small” and implied that “Capote had a certain identification with [Perry] . . . [as a] “misfit in society” (163). With these comments, the notion that can be opened up is that “Capote” portrays his own self image as societies “monster” through Perry in the text. In this case, “Capote” is depicted through Perry to imply to the reader that “Capote” himself wants not to be judged, but to be understood and appreciated for who he is with feelings, emotions and an above level of intelligence. This tone is returned to later on in the essay.

What is also strikingly noticeable in the film, “Capote” is that when “Capote” tenderly throws himself into the fray of his investigations of the murders, he is met and surrounded by a somewhat conservative society consisting of stereotypically snidish, heterosexual men. If one were to add that interpretation of the book to Garson’s comment that, “Capote . . . was frank about his homosexuality” (9) then it is not out of the question that Capote may have felt a sense of judgement raining down on him as soon
as he entered Kansas. The scene where “Capote” first meets Dewey could be seen to corroborate with this idea, as “Capote” is portrayed as having to react at being stared at with a comment about his scarf. This feeling is indeed made more striking in the scene within the film, where he talks to Laura Kinney and makes a telling comment, “oh it’s the hardest. You know when someone has a notion about you and it’s impossible to convince them otherwise. Ever since I was a child, folks seemed to think they had me, pegged because of the way I, The way I am n’ the way I talk. And they are always wrong. You know what I mean?” *(Capote)*

As a result of this comment, one can interpret in more visual terms, in what sense “Capote” has considered society’s impressions are of him. At the same time parallels can possibly be drawn to “Capote’s” depiction to Perry’s portrayal in the book which again criticises society’s conservatism and haste to judge monsters. How the reader should thus see them; that is, Perry and “Capote”, becomes more and more important for “Capote” himself as the narrative develops.

In any case the narrative technique thus goes all out to instigate a bad conscience in the reader and the reader is led at the same time into realising the importance of getting to know the *truth* about Perry. Simultaneously, a resembling form of that truth lingers too in the shadows behind Perry’s shoulder in the shape of “Capote”.

What later follows thus is a development in the narrative that travels from forcing the reader to understand the importance of getting to know Perry and possibly “Capote”, toward getting closer to Perry’s personal feelings and true inner psyche. In the following passage, Perry considers the real reason for violating his parole in Kansas prior to killing
the Clutter family. The narrative style depicts a kind of intense inner dialogue that is characterized by free indirect speech and practically no tagging for its entirety.

In the solitary, comfortless course of his recent driftings, Perry had over and over again reviewed this indictment, and had decided it was unjust. He did give a damn—but who had ever given a damn about him? His father? Yes up to a point. A girl or two but that was a “long story.” No one else except Willie Jay himself. And only Willie Jay had recognized his worth, his potentialities, had acknowledged that he was not just an undersized, overmuscled half breed, had seen him, for all the moralizing, as he saw himself – “exceptional,” “rare,” “artistic.” (Capote 45)

The style used to depict Perry in this scene gives the reader the impression of being forced deeper into Perry’s head and his emotions. The use of the personal pronoun in this passage nevertheless, can also be interpreted as again having been written with a degree of distancing. The result on this occasion is thus that the reader senses deeply a parental presence beside Perry; as if both he and the narrator are in a parent meeting. The reliable telling of Perry’s story can be seen to lay in the reputable hands of the narrator, rather than the tainted untrustworthy hands of the character Perry. There is a seal of legitimacy which increasingly provides the reader with, as Anderson commented earlier, an understanding of the author’s “intentionality” and in consequence an authorial perspective of truth associated with autobiography (2). In other words, through the narrator’s authorial interjection here, a true account of Perry is endorsed that might not otherwise be believable should the narrative just to come simply straight from Perry.
If the reader were to consider too that the various words of real dialogue in this clause are the only words that Perry actually said, then it is also noticeable that there are many words and phrases surrounding them that are not directly quoted. One could symbolically read into this that “Capote” signifies once again his intention to explain within these rather metaphorical words that Perry is protected, that he is sympathised with and that his praises are rung. The things that Perry himself in fact said can be seen to be exaggerated and as a result Perry is soaked in self-gratification. This exaggeration is further revealed by the use here of single adjectives that are stamped in the last line without reference words or joining phrases. Simultaneously, what the reader might also feel is that through this technique, “Capote” is trying to emphasise the reversal of (as previously described) society’s preconceived idea of Perry as a cold blooded killer; a monster.

The phrase “Cold blooded killer” too, is apt here as on one level it brings to light Capote’s possible reason for giving the book the title “In Cold Blood.” The reader is consequently drawn rather to the feeling that through this repetitive strategic tug on the reader’s conscience strings, “Capote” wants the reader to understand that the narrative is according to Markku Lehtimäki, “... not only about the four persons of the Clutter family killed in cold blood but equally about the two killers themselves executed by society” (68).

Considering then that Lehtimäki is implying that society has in effect killed Perry’s life then what could be seen to be left in the narrative is the portrayal of “Capote’s” life under the mask of Perry. If Capote has tried to create himself a mask in Perry or indeed neutralise Perry’s character to suit his intentions, then one could argue
that there is an irony behind the title (which Heyne points out) whereby it is the manipulation of Perry’s character to put across “Capote’s” own intentions that has indeed killed Perry (482)

It is possible that the narrative discloses to the reader a portrait of a person who, despite his talents and who according to Garson, “dreamed of being famous” (163) has to a great extent not been acknowledged for his artistic capabilities. At the same time through society’s neglectful handling of someone as special as Perry, a reason for Perry’s present situation and murderous actions is somewhat implied. As Garson comments, Perry is seen as a “deserted child; the lonely boy; the misfit in society…who grew up without direction, without love, someone who expects betrayal” (163) Here, Garson implies a dimension of shared experience and identity between Perry and Capote which is again important when considering the autobiographical perspective that was previously depicted by Anderson. This can be revealed through their similarities within Perry’s description in the narrative. According to Garson, Capote himself had been rejected by his mother (2) and grew up as lonely; “feeling different from the others” (2). Rejection was to follow him and his work as he grew up, due to his writing habits and writings that included the theme of homosexuality in Other Voices, Other Rooms (5). In short it can be construed that both men had undergone a very similar tragic history. As a result of these autobiographical details it is therefore not surprising that “Capote” was given the line in the film Capote: “It’s as if Perry and I grew up in the same house. One day, I went out the front door and he went out the back”. What is at odds with this point however, is as McAleer comments that Capote has claimed “… no natural attraction to the subject matter…” (205). McLeer himself, counter argues that comment by saying later
that “Although fealty [sic] to facts would not allow Capote to interpolate such data into his novel, it could not keep him from seeing himself in one of his protagonists Perry Smith” (208). Given this comment, it is thus natural for the reader to interpret the fact that the author Capote has felt a compassion for Perry with whom he felt attracted to. (Garson 163). With such a strong connection that Capote felt, suggested by Garson, it is likely she could confer that “Capote’s” relationship to Perry comes through the narrative as a subconscious need for “Capote” to tell as commented earlier, “the deeper Human question” (Capote 43). Accordingly, this essay prescribes that due to the impression obtained from Garson and to a degree McLeer, there a stronger argument for a construed significant and indeed symbolic relationship between “Capote” and Perry in ICB. As we have also already seen, not only is it possible for the reader to comprehend a kind of special relationship between them, but that the relationship is to a certain degree paternal and indeed at the same time symbiotic. The essay continues to make use of narratological methods to emphasise this kind of relationship.

A method that is developed to effectively make the reader feel a sense of compassion for Perry is demonstrated within ICB’s change of tempo. An example of this occurs at the point where Nye follows the lead that the police have received from Floyd Wells (Capote 164). The narrative unfolds to the point where the reader notices Capote’s use of embedded texts of direct speech that are at times purely diegetic. It is here that the reader correspondingly experiences an increase of pace and tension within the text. The drama of the situation heightens and incidences of dialogue increase to the extent that the reader becomes fully aware of hunters Dewey and Nye embarking on their hunt of the hunted; Dick and Perry:
Mr. A.A. Dewey, please. Kansas City calling.”

“This is Mr. Dewey”

“Go ahead, Kansas city. Your party is on the line.”


“Yes Brother.”

“Get ready for some very big news.”

“I’m ready”

“Our friends are here. Right here in Kansas City.”… (Capote 197-198)

How Capote portrays the hunters and the two convicts is telling, as the next scene provides the reader with completely contrasting signals:

In Miami Beach 335 Ocean Drive is the address of the Somerset Hotel…painted with more or less white, with many lavender touches…lining with white.. One Umbrella, pink, had written upon it “We Serve Valentine Ice-Cream,”… Perry said, “You never wished me a Happy Christmas Merry Christmas, honey. And a Happy New Year.” (Capote 199)

This scene does not only slow the pace of the narrative down, with its description of tragic innocents, but has the effect of violently juxtaposing itself with Dewey and Nye’s lines of internal focalization. The effect therefore that is intentionally created in the narrative is the awareness that Perry and Dick’s roles as killers have now been substituted somewhat symbolically and tragically for that of two innocent, naive and oblivious lambs unaware of a raging eager fox of authority looking for their blood. Such a representation of the two men can be compared to the view held by Garson when she comments: “the tension of the narrative increases as the hunters – the murderers become the hunted”
The climax of this ironic blissful ignorance comes straight out of Perry’s mouth when he wants Dick to wish him a Happy Christmas.

In this way, it can be discussed that the narrative presses this role reversal between representatives of “good” and “bad” on to the reader and alludes to the idea that Perry is seen as rather the prey to an inevitable fate beyond his control. If the reader reads into the narrative that Perry is to be punished, despite the fact that he is unaware of the rules of the chase and in other words unaware of his real circumstances at this point, this would definitely secure the legitimacy of “Capote’s” allusion to the reversal of good and bad. This allusion is that Perry is an innocent who has put faith in the wrong person with the wrong dreams and the wrong fate and without him knowing about it, then heads straight toward being one of the, “...victims of the large bureaucratic system of criminal justice in Kansas” (Garson 143).

The reader has been drawn from the scene at the beach with apprehension, to experience what could potentially be known as the climax of the book. This climax occurs at the point where Perry is given the most striking dialogue that describes events (in a thirteen-page confession to Dewey) that led to and occurred during the murder of the Clutter family. Here the reader is driven with Perry through a primarily externally focussed narrative on a somewhat desolate and vulnerable “Arizona highway” (232), where he is “goad[ed]” (232) or indeed (figuratively speaking) somewhat psychologically stabbed like an abused caged animal, into confessing. From the point then that Perry presumes that Dick has already confessed, through a character focalisation that is practically entirely direct speech, the reader gets the feeling that they are entirely now inside Perry’s head and possibly see and feel what he sees and feels. As a result, what is
interesting about this scene is that (despite the fact that the presence of the narrator is only revealed occasionally) what we really experience is nearly otherwise a monologue. Such a “monologue” of Perry’s stream of consciousness particularly raises our emotions to a climax of the book with such comments as: “I didn’t want to harm the man. I thought he was a very nice gentleman. Soft-spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat (Capote 244) and: “She said, ‘Oh, no! Oh, please. No! No! No! No! Don’t! Oh please don’t Please!’ I gave the gun to Dick. I told him I’d done all I could do. He took aim, and she turned her face to the wall” (Capote 245).

The emotions that this scene provoke in the reader do not only, as Capote puts it, include a sense of “sorrow” and “profound fatigue” (245), but through an intensity that only a “monologue” like this can create, the reader feels a kind of relief when it is over. Influencing that feeling of relief, during the scene, Capote employs the following comments: “Smith smokes with closed eyes, and explains, “I’m thinking I want to remember this just the way it was. “ He pauses for quite a while” (Capote 233) and “Wait. I am not telling it as it was.” Perry scowls. He rubs his legs; the handcuffs rattle” (Capote 244). What Perry says here greatly affects the reader’s reaction to the monologue as a whole. It adds greatly to an intensity that makes the reader nearly feel like (where once they witnessed Perry’s narrated character), they are now Perry himself confessing and feeling like they are sitting on a psychologist’s couch or even sitting in a confessional with a Catholic priest. There, in the comfort of the surroundings guilt-ridden minds have been liberated of the burden of their actions. It is now when the connection within the relationship between Berger’s “the teller, listener (spectator) and
protagonist (s)” (qtd. in Hartsock 51) is most apt and is at this point where each dimension merges into one.

It is the connection we make here to the “Capote”, which from our previous connection to Perry and Perry’s connection to “Capote” thus completes Berger’s three dimensioned triangle. This triangle can be seen within this confession, as it is not impossible to read into the text the autobiographical dimension where “Capote” could himself have feelings of guilt indistinguishable from those of Perry here. One could deduce that this is a confessional of “Capote’s” own which creates some kind of personal relief. Indeed in hindsight of Futterman’s strongly portrayed reflections, “Capote” was left nearly debilitated by a chain of actions and stream of conscience, which would very much justify his need for confession. In order to make a great self-proclaimed ground-breaking novel, Capote used an ambitious immersion technique of interviewing. This method inevitably drove “Capote” to become ironically entrapped inside a cauldron of ambition that tragically relied upon (as mentioned earlier) an artistic glorification and to some degree exploitation of a violent murderer’s life on the verge of execution. This meant that he found himself sitting at the epicentre of the two poles of suffering; Perry on the one hand, and all who adored the Clutter family that could be seen to represent the American dream, on the other. Capote could be seen thus in search of an honest truth, to have self-designed a situation that led to a conflict of interests, only to be sucked unavoidably into a black hole of complex inner torture. As Clarke mentions “[Perry] not only caused him depression and anxiety. [He] presented him with an insoluble moral dilemma (352). A Confession then could very well have been his relief from this.
However, “Capote” follows this confession with Dewey’s free indirect speech that creates a sharp contrast to Perry’s very personal account. Again the narrator, whilst distanced from the situation through the use of verbs in the past tense, nevertheless gives us the impression that by creating this contrast, he wants to give the reader an impression of something important. It could be seen that “Capote” intends to represent an answer to Perry’s plea of forgiveness through Dewey’s comment, especially when Dewey is given to consider Perry in the following way: “Dewey’s sympathy . . . was not deep enough to accommodate either forgiveness or mercy. He hoped to see Perry and his partner hanged-hanged back to back”. (p.246) Whilst on the one hand, Dewey is portrayed here as having a measure of sympathy, he is depicted as being quite clear in his view; that he sees retribution and death to be the end result of such a confession or therapeutic process. This attitude does not correspond with the attitude behind the comment that lies in the same clause: “The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightening” (p.245). The fact that this statement lies within the same clause as the previous statement, can however be seen to be rather problematic in that it is free of tags, so whilst it does not evoke the presence of the narrator, neither is it pure dialogue. Everywhere else in the clause, the sentences divulge linguistic clues that connect the sentences to Dewey. This sentence however does not, as there are no personal pronouns indicating that it is a character’s opinion. It would not therefore, be unnatural to claim that “Capote” has written this sentence based upon a need to portray an intention of release from the responsibility of taking on Perry’s cause. One can imagine that the author “Capote”, strained by the tension of this self fulfilling responsibility and socio-political pressure (Clarke implies), attempts to drift
further and further away from the aforementioned “teller, listener (spectator) and protagonist triangle” in the narrative. Nevertheless it is made quite clear that the fact that Perry is not yet dead prevents true disclosure and the last act of execution conjures up fresh feelings. “Capote” has done before, so does he again bring up what he calls the “deeper human question” (43) which is again reflected in the hanging scene.

What is evident within the scene where Hickock and Perry are executed, is “Capote’s” close proximity to Dewey’s thoughts of Perry at that time: “Like the majority of American law-enforcement officials, Dewey is certain that capital punishment is a deterrent to violent crime, and he felt that if ever the penalty had been earned, the present instance was it” [own emphases] (Capote 340). Narratologically speaking, the above quote is in itself is extremely interesting and problematic due to the following factors. Firstly, what the reader sees in the narrative is (as Genette calls it) an “internal focalisation” (qtd. in Barry 4) because Dewey’s viewpoint comes through an internal thought; an opinion of capital punishment. Nevertheless, the dichotomy is evident when these thoughts are juxtaposed with the second fact which is that the narrative describes that, “Dewey is certain that capital punishment is...”. Here, the reader is given an account of what Dewey is in fact saying, which is characteristic (according to Genette) of external focalisation; there is an impression given here that Dewey’s mind is in fact speaking. That this is not either a direct “quote” signifying that Dewey’s thoughts are being quoted once again makes the reader of a manipulation of what thoughts are revealed.

One could suggest that “Capote” has taken it upon himself to act as an authorial voice for Dewey (as with Perry) on this occasion and again as previously noted make a
final stab at America’s justice system. At the same time by indicating to the reader that Capote is able to be Dewey, he is able to proclaim to the reader that he was there as an authoritative witness. With this role he demonstrates the right to share something with the reader that couldn’t actually be heard yet infer that it is really what Dewey thinks and feels. Another way of looking at this is that Dewey says this to himself: “Dewey is certain” Dewey could be interpreted here as justifying to himself right then and there that what he is experiencing is right and just. However, due to a strong presence felt of “Capote” in the narration, it is likely within this argument that to some degree “Capote” is exaggerating any doubt that Dewey might have, to the extent that it is “Capote” who is asking the question “Are you certain Dewey that capital punishment is a deterrent to violent crime?” If this is “Capote’s” authorial voice coming through then his cynicism is somewhat underlined by the second half of the passage that says: “and he felt that if ever the penalty had been earned, the present instance was it” (Capote 340). This quote clearly denotes a view that “Capote” has not at any time in *ICB*, revealed to be his own and thus, as such, seems rather sarcastic. The relevance of this analysis of Dewey lies in the importance of how “Capote” returns in the narrative, to wanting the reader see Perry. It is within the subsequent passage that “Capote’s” attention to Dewey’s consideration toward Perry under the course of his hanging, is brought to the readers notice,

But Smith, though he was the true murderer, aroused another response, for Perry possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded, that the detective could not disregard. He remembered his first meeting with Perry in the interrogation room at Police headquarters in Las Vegas –the dwarfish boy-man seated in the metal chair, his small booted feet not quite brushing the
floor. And when Dewey now opened his eyes, this is what he saw: the same childish feet, tilted, dangling. (340-1)

These feelings in themselves are nevertheless uncharacteristic of Dewey and the reader’s doubt that he felt them is accentuated by the fact that “Capote” portrays thoughts and feelings of Dewey that he cannot himself know. In turn the reader understands the weakness of this indirect claim to know what Dewey says, by the fact that what is said is not quoted and as a consequence once again touched by “Capote’s” metaphorical brush.

What is related again then in this passage are indeed thoughts that indicate “Capote’s” connection to Perry. The imagery that contains an aura of inhumanity that “Capote’s” uses to describe Perry on this occasion, portrays the only quality Perry has left; from the dreams of artistic attributes Perry once held to the inhuman figure that Perry been destined to become. It is not beyond the realms of possibility here that Capote wants to write the epitaph for Perry in exclamation to Dewey, of what creature society has created and as such suitably slain. With all hope gone, all that is left to be hanged is the product of a maimed life, inhuman, hunted down and executed.

What is possibly the strongest indication of “Capote’s” presence here is the phrase above: “that the detective could not disregard.” What is interesting is that “Capote” has chosen to describe Dewey as the detective. This can be construed as a conscious effort to distance the reader from Dewey and possibly even “Capote” from Dewey. Also this creates the effect of a placing of a kind of full stop by “Capote”, upon what it is that he wants Dewey and society to understand. This attempt to enlighten Dewey and society, takes the form of a message commenting that the likes of Perry who are hung to death in the end only create the very monster that society is afraid of.
In accordance with Anderson’s previous comments, the simple fact that “Capote’s” intention is noticeable, cries a strong an element of autobiography from the perspective of identity. For example, the reader sees again here the connection made between Perry and “Capote” as monsters that are finally both dead. Perry had indeed undergone death by hanging and according to Clarke,

“[Truman] had mined his subject, but his subject had also mined him, exhausting his nerves, his reservoir of patience, and his powers of concentration; depleting, in short, his capital as both a man and a writer. “No one will ever know what *In Cold Blood* took out of me,” [Truman] said. “It scraped me right down to the marrow of my bones. It nearly killed me. I think, in a way, it *did* kill me... I just can’t forget it, particularly the hangings at the end. Horrible!” (397-8)

One then has to consider within this context to what extent “Capote’s” nature should not be “disregarded”. It would not be altogether impossible to hear Capote’s voice behind these words really saying that “Perry and I are dead yet, don’t disregard our lives, or who we really truly are if you want to know the honest truth”.

5. Conclusion

Truman Capote wrote the book *ICB* in a conscious effort to utilize both artistic and very detailed writing of the people concerned with the murders in Kansas. When reading the work however, the reader is faced with a dilemma. This dilemma is revealed by asking whether the fact that the author Capote can be interpreted as crossing the fictional boundaries of literary journalism by injecting artistic and autobiographical
elements through in particular his portrayal of Perry Smith, can take away Capote’s honest truth in the book, or enhance it. The process of answering this question has begun by analysing *ICB* from a narratological perspective in the book; focussing on grammatical and stylistic elements rather than in the first hand what the narrative says. This analysis has thus provided the grounds for using Anderson’s autobiographical explanation as a blueprint which analyses *ICB* in such a way as to support Capote’s honest truth claim. This lies thus in contrast with what the critics have done which is to question *ICB*’s bias within *ICB* as an argument against Capote’s truth claim.

It is from the basis of these suppositions that the reader is drawn to a flamboyant and externally focalised part of narrative containing the description of Perry’s physical characteristics. The argument thus is that through this over exaggerated description of Perry as paramount to being inhuman, “Capote” intentionally seeks to criticise society’s judgmental, incriminating and irresponsible association to Perry and the likes of Perry. That Capote can be seen to “sentimentalize his protagonist” (Heyne 482) could be argued against the reliability of “Capote’s” depiction within this characterisation; however the narrative points to an autobiographical intention behind “Capote’s” aim to awaken the reader into seeing him as he truly is beneath the surface rather as being inhuman. It is through Anderson’s description of “identity” within autobiography, juxtaposed with the biographical details of Capote’s appearance, demeanour and feelings, that the reader understands the sense that Capote may simultaneously associate with Perry’s situation. This association adds weight to the autobiographical angle of Capote’s truth.

The analysis of the narrative that describes Perry’s thoughts concerning his parole and relationship with Willie Jay reveals free indirect speech and untagged inner dialogue
that consequently draws the reader closer inside Perry’s head and to his emotions. Again, there is a notable underlying intention that the reader should listen to the authorial voice selling Perry’s positive attributes and check society’s view of him as an inhuman coldblooded killer. However, a stronger sense of “Capote’s” presence here is noticeable through the use of personal pronouns. Not only are Perry’s attributes of being “exceptional,” “rare,” and “artistic” (Capote 45) are accentuated, but that from an autobiographical standpoint the author Capote’s own reflections in own his life can be seen to be superimposed onto Perry.

It is through a change in pace and tension in the next moment that we get even closer to Perry’s feelings as the hunted rather than the hunter. Here again the narrative forces the reader and society to feel compassion for Perry and an inevitable dire oblivious fate of punishment which awaits him exposes him as (Garson comments) a “victim of the large bureaucratic system of justice in Kansas.” Again Capote signals an autobiographical dimension as he too has been subjected to unfair criticism in his life.

Within Perry’s confession scene the essay discusses how the reader gets as close to Perry’s inner emotions as is possible; by bearing witness to nearly an entire narrative of monologue of a confession containing direct speech. Whilst this monologue pertains to Perry, the reader nevertheless feels drawn to the idea that it is also they and “Capote” who confess here. As a result the connection between Perry Capote and the reader is at its height.

In the final scene, there is a sense that “Capote” portrays his presence at the hanging and authorial presence inside Dewey’s head that rejects clearly the reader’s previous sense of retreat from the distance created in the narrative. As the author
“Capote” returns in a sense to his narrative with an epitaph of a depressing farewell both to the executed Perry and in some senses to himself the reader returns to the feeling that Capote shares in Perry’s destiny after all.

The book has led the reader on a journey that carries them closer and closer into Perry’s head and consequently to “Capote’s” feelings. As a consequence of the point where the teller- Capote, listener- reader- and protagonist Perry merge, Capote’s honest truth claim is at its most potent. It is here where the reader themselves experience the possible true feelings and insights of Capote and Perry which through manipulation or artistic writing could not have been felt or believed in any other more objective journalistic way of telling the truth of the story. The end result therefore is that it is through Capote’s use of these artistic techniques providing an autobiographical dimension to the narrative, that the reader can be satisfied with having read ICB from a real perspective of truth; as Anderson states honest truth.

Finally, this essay suggests that more work needs to be done within the area of autobiography in ICB, particularly within its scope as a confessional book. It has not been within the scope of this assignment to draw out further this area of analysis. It is likely that an enhanced sense of truth could be established were this to be done. A more in depth analysis of other scenes would also provide the reader with a more in-depth and reliable analysis of Capote’s intentions.
6. Works cited


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