

*Towards a Rhetoric of Fictionality in the  
Nonfiction Novel: A Study of Truman  
Capote's In Cold Blood*

By:

Dr. Majeed U. Jadwe

Assistant Professor

Anbar University-College of Arts

Majeed M. Mudden

Instructor

Anbar University-College of Education

*Although Capote's notorious incorporation of purely fictionalized scenes in his seminal nonfiction novel In Cold Blood, subtitled A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences, (1965) has long been exposed and well documented, the substantial body of criticism produced on this issue is still haunted by what amount to a sort of illegitimacy fallacy.*

*The incorporated elements are fictionalized scenes that range from few paragraphs to several pages. These are four in number. They all appear in the last part of the book which is entitled "The Corner." The first scene depicts the sale of Nancy Clutters's pet horse in the auctioning of the murdered family's property. Capote radically changed the details of the sale for no obvious reason. Capote's version of the sale in In Cold Blood goes like this:*

*"I hear fifty...fifty-five...seventy...":  
the bidding was laggardly,nobody seemed  
really to want Babe, and the man who got  
her,a Mennonite farmer who said he might  
use her for plowing, paid seventy-five dollars.  
As he led her out of the corral, Sue Kidwell  
ran forward, she raised her hand as though to  
waving goodbye, but instead clasped it over  
her mouth. (1)*

*The investigations of the journalist Robert Pearman uncovered that Capote's report of the sale of Babe is radically inaccurate. Pearman found that the horse was actually sold to the father of the postmaster who kept her as a brood mare. He paid \$182.50 for her. Babe, however, was later destined for a better future. She was eventually used by the YMCA to teach kids to ride. (2)*

*The next two scenes center on the character of the murderer Perry Smith. The first of these two fictional scenes shows Perry's remorse after his condemnation to death by the Garden City court. Capote's version of this scene in *In Cold Blood* is narrated by Mrs. Meier, the undersheriff's wife. She was washing the dishes when she heard Perry crying in the cell adjacent to her kitchen. Events follow like this:*

*I heard him crying, I turned on the radio.  
Not to hear him. But I could. Crying like a child.  
He'd never broke down before, shown any sign of  
it. Well, I went to him. The door of his cell. He  
reached out his hand. He wanted me to hold his  
hand, and I did, I held his hand, and all he said  
was, "I'm embraced by shame." (p.345)*

*But the real Mrs. Meier denied that anything of this had ever happened. In fact, she gave a radically different version of that of Capote. In a telephone call with Philip Tompkins she she said that she was in her bedroom in that same day and that she did not hear Perry crying. His cell, moreover, was not adjacent to her kitchen. There was no possibility, therefore, for Perry to ask her to catch his hand. She also denied repeatedly that Perry said , or she heard him saying , "I'm embraced by shame." More importantly, Mrs. Meier made it clear that she did not know where Capote got these information from. (3)*

*In view of Mrs. Meier's denial and protestations, it is clear that Capote had invented things that did not happen at all. But the thing that remains most disturbing is that why should Capote be fabricating things and attributing them to living witnesses who can easily contradict them. Carelessness on the part of Capote, however, is completely overruled as Capote was to repeat this practice in the second of the fictionalized Perry Smith scenes but this time with a whole crowd of witnesses to contradict his report. Somewhere near*

*the end of the novel Perry is reported by Capote to deliver the following last speech moments before his execution:*

*“I think,” he said, “it’s a helluva thing to take a life in this manner. I don’t believe in capital punishment, morally or legally. Maybe I had something to contribute, something ---“ His assurance faltered; shyness blurred his voice, lowered it to a just audible level. “It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize.” (p.381)*

*But Tompkins’s investigations proved that Capote’s report here is groundless. Capote was one of the twenty odd persons invited to witness the execution ceremony. Most of these witnesses, especially the wire-men and the journalists, agreed that Capote was out of ear-reach from Perry at the time of hanging. Agent Dewey, through his eyes this scene is related, was not sure that Perry said these things and he does not know how Capote got his information. (4)*

*Furthermore, This same scenario of authorial report and witness’s denial was not only to be repeated directly in the heel of the previous fictionalized scene but also to involve Alvin Dewey as its narrative agency. The last and longest of these four fictional scenes concludes the novel. It is a flashback by detective Dewey at the time of Perry’s execution. Because the execution of the two criminals does not provide him with “a sense of climax, release, of a design justly completed,”(p.382) Dewey discovers himself recalling a casual meeting with Nancy Clutters’s best friend Sue Kidwell in the town cemetery a year before the execution. Dewey was unweeding the grave of his father. He met Sue, by now a young woman, near the graves of the Clutters family. She is a student at Kansas State university. They engage in a short conversation over random topics that mostly show the changes that occurred since the trial like changes in the town and characters’ fate such as Nancy’s boyfriend, Bobby Rupp. Sue then departs leaving Dewey amusing “ just such a young woman as Nancy might have been.” (p. 384)*

*But this beautifully constructed ending turned to be factually inaccurate. Ten years after the publication of the novel Agent Dewey*

and Sue's mother wrote a letter to Capote's biographer Gerald Clarke denying that such a meeting ever happened. Clarke, however, feels that this scene is Capote's only act of relatively pure fiction is justifiable : "Since events had not provided him with a happy scene, he was forced to make one." (5) This echoes Capote's own confession that "people thought I should have ended with the hangings, that awful last scene. But I felt I had to return to the town, to bring everything back full circle, to end with peace." (6)

But regardless of how benevolent the author's intentions really are, these scenes remain fictional fabrications that represent a real threat to the factual authenticity of the work. Capote's unjustified incorporation of these purely fictional scenes in what he himself has repeatedly claimed to be a perfectly factual reconstruction of a true crime and its consequences has earned the author negative critical responses throughout the critical history of the text. This act of fictionalizing has frequently been stigmatized as cheating and that these fictional scenes are illegitimized to the text of the novel.

Such judgements, however, are mainly established on certain generic considerations and authorial proclamations. Judging by generic conventions, Capote's inclusion of these fictionalized scenes in his work is a violation of the principle of factual accuracy which is the very foundation of the nonfiction novel genre. Capote, who was the first to coin this term, has fashioned the nonfiction novel vis-a-vis this principle of factual precision. It constitutes the cornerstone of his definition of this new mode of writing. The nonfiction novel, according to Capote, is "a narrative form that employed all the techniques of fictional art but was nevertheless immaculately factual." (7) Factual accuracy is secured through the succinct application of the techniques and methods of journalistic reportage. The resulting factual account is subsequently fashioned into a literary form by emplotting it into a distinct aesthetic structure.

In an interview conducted shortly after the publication of *In Cold Blood*, Capote made it clear that this process of novelistic emplotment operative in the nonfiction novel is a mere stylistic business in comparison with the more crucial issue of factual accuracy. Capote contends that the nonfiction novel is a "journalistic narrative that employed all the creative devices and techniques of fiction to tell a true story that...[reads] precisely like a novel." (8) He stresses that in such a genre the subject is of no importance but is

merely the “x” in the “quadratic equation” of a “stylistic problem.” (9)

*But this is not to suggest that the nonfiction novel is that easy and simplistic practice. On the contrary, the establishment of a narrative flow of highly verifiable data commensurate with external factual reality requires extensive labour and complete commitment on the part of the practitioner of this genre. Capote, for instance, spent some six years researching the particulars of the murder of the entire four-member Clutter family in a small Kansas town in November 1959 and the subsequent arrest, trial, and execution of the murderers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith in April 1965. He used the technique of immersion and saturation reportage to research the crime and its aftermath, recording some six thousand pages of notes including correspondence, court records, extended interviews, newspaper and magazine accounts, diary entries and weather reports.*

*This impressive scope of work would, no doubt, be instrumental in consolidating the authenticity of any authorial claim of factual perfection. Indeed, much of the praise that Capote received derives largely from his self-advertised claims of factual perfection in *In Cold Blood*. His life-long public assertion of the perfect factual precision of his work makes clear this correlation between the magnificent magnitude of work scope and authorial claims. When Capote, for instance, was asked by one interviewer whether *In Cold Blood* contains any fictional ‘inventions’, he replied confidently ‘no’. He went on asserting in a defiant tone that “one doesn’t spend six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions.” (10)*

*Now when the text defies the best of Capote’s assertions, critical response, as well as that of the reading public, becomes vindictive, if not derogatory, It is natural that what is textually illegitimized as a violation of genre standards becomes an ethical charge because Capote is trafficking in real-life situations and people. Philip Tompkins neatly sums up this critical and ethical indictment levelled against Capote in the conclusion to his pioneering study of the factual inaccuracies in *In Cold Blood*. Tompkins believes that Capote has crafted a work of art of high calibre. But Tompkins, nevertheless, contends that Capote committed a crucial error:*

*But despite the brilliance of his self-publicizing efforts, he has made both a tactical and a moral error that will hurt him in the short run. By insisting that every word of his work is true he has made himself vulnerable to those readers who are prepared to examine seriously such a sweeping claim. (11)*

*It should be noticed here that Capote's "tactical and moral error" is a matter of "incorporation" rather than one of "fictionalizing". Tompkins condemns Capote's choice of inclusion rather than the dynamics and functionality of these fictional scenes as an act of fictionalizing. Incorporation has to do with the ethics of representation whereas fictionalizing is purely textual business that has to do with the functionality of these scenes on the level of narrative discourse. The latter standpoint is ultimately more appropriate to apprehend the textual premises underlying the existence of such fictional elements in a self-declared factual narrative because it shifts the meaning from the author to the text itself. Such a shift would no doubt affect a change of perspectives from authorial motivation to the dynamics of textual functionality. Such a shift of critical grounds is justified on the basis that in spite of their established fictive nature these four scenes are textually interpellated in the narrative discourse of the novel and, therefore, retain a full functional status at the level of discourse. Put in other words, the application of such a critical perspective on these fictional scenes in *In Cold Blood* would inevitably help to undermine the traditional truth-conditioned concept of "legitimacy" through the actualization of these fictional scenes as functional textual units operative on the level of the narrative discourse.*

*Recent critical theories of discourse and narratology tend to substantiate this claim by suggesting that fictionality is an inherent condition of narrativity and, therefore, a natural element in the aesthetically executed nonfictional narrative. "The significance of narrative," according to Richard Walsh, "is not latent in the data of experience, or of imagination, but fabricated in the process of subjecting that data to the elemental rhetoric of the narrative form*

itself. The categorical difference between real and imagined events is overwhelmed by the artificiality of narrative representation in either case: all narrativity, from this point of view, shares in the properties of fictionality.” (12)

The power of narrativity is really the ultimate underlying cognitive premiss in the epistemological paradigm of the nonfiction novel genre. The textual fashioning of the referential works through the displacement of the fictive from the narrative discourse. on the basis of reference-correspondence. Because the displaced is always superversive, fictionality re-surfaces on the margins of the narrative discourse of nonfictional narrative . The theoretical framework for this survival of the fictive in thoroughly factual narratives is expounded by Hayden White, the chief exponent of narrative theory in history. In his essay entitled “ The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” White describes the fictionalizing strategies operative in the construction of historical narratives in a way that equally applies to the nonfiction novel genre:

By the very construction of a set of events in such a way as to make a comprehensible story out of them, the historian charges those events with the symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot-structure. Historians may not like to think of their works as translations of ‘fact’ into ‘fiction’; but this is one of the effects of their works.(13)

White proceeds to substantiate this argument by demonstrating how the selection of material and the imposition of narrative forms, as well as the closure that such form entails, leads to an account in which the original elements are themselves necessarily transformed. Such is the case with *In Cold Blood* where Capote’s imposition of his values and assumptions undermines the factual status of the text as a purely objective reportage. This is nowhere more evident than in the title of this work, *In Cold Blood*, which reveals the book’s enthymemic thesis which is an attack upon capital punishment rather than the murder of the Clutters in cold blood. Although the later is more logical and

*integral to the intention and method of the work as a factual reconstruction of a murder and its aftermath, Capote's, perhaps unconscious, subjection of the his factual data to the web of his personal expectations and desires was so subversive to the extent that factual experience is being bracketed and fashioned with a different signification. The narrative stratification of intentionality presupposes a degree of fictionality that finds its full adumbration in the reconstruction of the character of the murderer Perry Smith. The murder itself is eclipsed and is denied its proper signification as a narrative agency. The narrative instead is shadowed by a far more powerful politics of transcendence of the murderer as a human. Transcendence operates through the appropriation of fictionality to fashion the murderer as a human especially in the last part of the book. Indeed, all the fictionalized scenes occur in the last part of the book and they are mostly set to "positivize" the character of Perry. It is in this part of the book that the narrative takes its final destination. The "actual" reference of the title is fully subverted by the end of the book, mainly through the last two fictionalized scenes, to refer to the formal and deliberate execution of the criminals by the people of the state of Kansas. It is not the Clutters, then, who are murdered 'in cold blood'. Society is ultimately incriminated as the victimizer of Dick and Perry who, in turn, become the victims of this American tragedy. This reversal is strongly invoked in the authorial musing on Dewey's feelings over the dangling body of the hanged murderer. "Perry," for Dewey, "possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded..." (pp.381-2) Because this statement is inserted btween the last two fictional scenes, that occur successively at the end of the novel, it is not clear whether it is fictionalized or just a factual detail. In any case, it remains a textual moment brackted in the narrative discourse of nonfictional works.*

*But apart from the textual anomlies of authorial selfhood, the transfiguration of fictionality during the narrative fashioning of actual experience is, in many ways, an offshot of the pervasive interplay of two authorial projections: interpretation and ideology. The act of narrative emplotment, according to White , presupposes a degree of interpretative distancing and is itself ideologically implicated as it reflects ethics and assumptions the nonfiction novel practitioner cultivates about the nature of external reality and the ontology of human existence.The textual materialization of interpretation and*



*ideology in the narrative structuration of nonfictional data operates to undermine the stability of reference-correspondence as the ultimate arbiter of the narrative's "world view". Reference, at such moments, no longer retains its normal status as existential reality. It is rather textually interpellated to the phenomenological "world-view" of the restructured narrative. Only then, fictionality can claim a place in the text.*

*But in spite of the fact that fictionality is textually legitimized it has no autonomous status in narrativity, at least, on the epistemic level. It is rhetorical in status and hybridized in the narrative discourse of nonfictional texts. All the fictional scenes in *In Cold Blood* are rhetorical in the sense that they are not an organic part of the plot configuration of the murder and its aftermath, i.e., the escape, the capture, trial and execution of the murderers. They can be deleted without any real harm to the work because they are part of the fabula, rather than the sujet. This aligns the fictional elements in the nonfictional narrative with the aesthetic experience which the act of emplotment confers on the narrative. The aesthetic, here, is a matter of "effect" in terms of readership. Fictionality is allowed to surf in a nonfictional narrative in such a way as to appropriate the reader's response to the thematics of authorial intentionality without undermining the factual status of the narrative. The stratification of the aesthetic in fictionality, however, is contractual with the degree of emotionality the reader is geared to cultivate in his/her response. Sympathy, sorrow, and tenderness are key-words here.*

*Almost all the fictional scenes in *In Cold Blood* are designed to elicit a graded spectrum of such emotional responses from the reader. Pearman, for instance, is perhaps right to conclude that Capote was reaching for pathos rather than realism in his inaccurate report of the sale of Nancy's pet horse. Indeed, this scene is designed to evoke a full range of pathos, eliciting feelings of tenderness, pity, and ultimately sympathetic sorrow from the reader in a graded way. The horse is depicted as a further victim of the tragedy of the Clutters. Capote represents Babe as an unwanted woman past her prime. The horse is undersold and suggestions of future abuse loom large in the background of the deal. This is strongly prefigured in Capote's intentional change of the buyer of Babe and the purpose of buying it. Capote's choice of the hard and masculine-type 'Mennonite farmer' is planned to illicit strong feelings of sympathy and pity from the reader.*

*This is further supplemented by the highly emotionally charged farewell scene which brings pathos to a powerful display. Capote's evocation of pathos, however, is at once graded and natural in appeal. This is due to Capote's grounding of this fictionalized and pathos-invoking episode in the larger temporal frame of the actual auctioning of the Clutters's property that took place at March 21, 1960. The blending of factual and fictional details is a sort of cross-dressing where the fictional is legitimized as part of the narrative. The sale comes last in the factual perspective of the larger auction. The scene is staged for the reader as the focus zoom in at the horse. Another selectional process is also operating to single one of the attendants, this time Nancy's close friend, Sue. The selection is projected within the narrative perspective of this scene. This is why the scene of the sale is purely based on reporting. This form of narration is quite suitable to the criterion of selection because it is oriented towards the appropriation of reader's response to the experiential structure of the narrative flow in the scene. Selection, furthermore, works on the assumption of emotional potential of the object zoomed down in relation to readership. This potential is invoked and intensified through the reinscription of the absent owner of the horse in a highly elegiac retrospection. Combination of the selected is, therefore, Capote's strategy to usher the reader in the thematics of the narrative. The reader, by now, is no longer a watcher but a passive recipient whose dynamics of response is largely framed by the emotional upload of the narrative perspective of the scene staged. It should be remembered here that the inscription of reader's response is solely done in the factual prelude to the fictionalized scene. This, in essence, is part of the politics of cross-dressing Capote employs in the construction of this scene as a subtext. So when the factual converges with the fictional drama erupts as an interface for this convergence. Quotation marks are used to effect such a textual interface. Fictionalized details follow to activate the emotional potential already invested in the appropriated reader's response. The Horse as an unwanted old woman, shadowy future, and the pities of the final goodbye occur in such rapid succession that the reader is suddenly, and unconsciously, brought to the verge of anger and angst. The reader, by now, has become an active participant in the scene.*

Capote, however, was to follow the same strategy of emotional investment in the two scenes related to the character of Perry Smith but with little modification due to the nature and magnitude of these two scenes. These two scenes are, in fact, climactic moments in the book-wide authorial endeavours to exact a degree of sympathy from the reader for Perry. They are 'designed' to 'humanize' the otherwise grotesque figure of a criminal by attributing to him alleged gestures of remorse and penance. Tompkins, in this respect, arrives at the same conclusion in his analysis of these two scenes in *In Cold Blood*. "By imparting conscience and compassion to Perry," declares Tompkins, "Capote was able to convey qualities of inner sensitivity, poetry and a final posture of contrition in his hero." (14)

If this conclusion holds true, further complications ensue over the issue of Capote's detachment from the object of his work. The portrait of Perry is in many ways the product of Capote's sympathy with him and that these two scenes are no more than the climax of this sympathy. This is a violation of Capote's own insistence that the author's complete withdrawal from his narrative is a prerequisite condition for the production of the nonfiction novel. (15)

So, is this sympathy justifiable in view of the damage it inflicted on *In Cold Blood*? Current interpretation of the possible causes of this sympathy blame it all on the psychology of Capote's personality. It is believed that Capote's sympathy for Perry "comes to great measure from a certain identification with him." (16) Perry, in this interpretation, is a psychological projection of Capote's fears and anxieties. Like Capote, Perry was dwarfish, dreamy, and suffered a childhood of disaffection and rejection. The affinities go further to include such things as face image and names. Capote, in an interview, used the image of the 'changeling's face' to describe himself and Perry. While in a recurrent reverie in *In Cold Blood* Perry used to dream of himself as a famous Las Vegas star with the name of Perry O'Parsons. This unambiguously echoes Capote's original name; Truman Persons.

But such a categorization of these two fictionalized scenes as far offshots of the author's troubled psychology leaves no ground to account for the textual status of fictionality as a functional element in the narrative mosaic of *In Cold Blood*. Such a ground is secured by another interpretation of Capote's sympathetic portrayal of Perry in these scenes. This approach finds Perry more a fictional character

than a real life person. Such an assumption is based on two premisses. First, it is based on Capote's confession that "Perry was a character that was also in my imagination...[he] could absolutely...[have] stepped right out of one of my stories." (17) Second, basing on this it is found that Capote deliberately fashioned Perry after his other fictional characters of the early fictional works. The pygmy figure Jesus Fever, the sideshow midget, and Miss Wisteria in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), and the old woman in *Tree of Night* (1949), are each, like Perry Smith, freakishly out of proportion. Capote continues this tradition by accentuating the physical deformities of the murderers. Describing Perry Smith, Capote writes:

*His tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers; when he stood up, 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 like a well-built truck driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound (p.26).*

This perspective has far more implications for the textual dissemination of fictionality in *In Cold Blood* in connection with both the factual narrative and the reader as recipient of this narrative. Bringing to the fore the very factual foundation of Perry's character operates to invest these two scenes with an interpretational potential necessary for the interpellation of the experiential structure of the reader's response to the signifying practices of the text.

The theoretical premisses of this interpellation of the reader's response of the type operative in these two fictionalized scenes is elucidated by the critic Trenton Hickman in his perceptive analysis of the role of the reader in *In Cold Blood*, entitled "The Last to See Them Alive": *Panopticism, the Supervisory Gaze and Catharsis in Capote's In Cold Blood*. Hickman contends that Capote stages his story in *In Cold Blood* as he stages a visual event for viewers :

*Containing his characters within specific boundaries not only determined by the "history" of the actual Holcomb murders but by Capote's own desires for drama and scandal. Once contained in a novelistic structure reminiscent of Foucault's reiteration of Bentham's panopticon. Capote's characters are forced into a spectacle that offers readers of the book vicarious participation in the slaughter of an entire family from Kansas. (18)*

*Hickman proceeds to prove that this strategy offers not only an angle into the criminal mind but also a catharsis for the reader. He claims, furthermore, that Capote's panoptic inscription of reader's response is the very template for fictionalizing nonfiction events in a nonfiction novel.(19) Hickman, however, limits his discussion to factual textual details or scenes which did not materialize textually like the near rape of Nancy Clutter. He, in fact, never treated the fictionalized episodes in *In Cold Blood* to substantiate his thesis of the panoptic as a template for fictionalizing in a nonfictional text.*

*Nevertheless, the two Perry Smith fictional scenes highlight the panoptic gaze as the textual medium for the re-shaping of reader's response according to the dictates of heurmantic thematics of the hybridized narrative. In each a 'spectacle' is staged to materialize a supervisory gaze from the reader as a watcher. The erection of such a 'spectacle' is mostly executed through the implementation of melodrama and theatricality in the fashioning of these scenes in the narrative discourse of the novel. Melodrama and theatricality enter in the act of staging as Capote's strategy to materialize the reader's gaze into the voyeuristic domain of textuality.*

*Each of these scenes has strong element of theatricality and melodrama. It is quite improbable for Perry to show such deep and sudden shame. He stretches his hand from behind the bars of his cell reaching it, in such a melodramatic way, to Mrs. Meir begging her to hold it. This is Dickensian in its melodramatic proportion. It is improbable even in terms of the world-view that Capote was trying to fashion in his narrative because Perry's feeling of shame is not moral. It is rather social in nature and hence its incompatibility with*

*Perry's code of ethics which is manifestly anti-social. The same is valid for Perry's execution speech. Its melodrama and theatricality betray its fictionality. It is improbable as a last speech at an execution ceremony on two scores. First, it is too formal as a last speech allowed for a condemned person at the moment of his execution. It sounds like a manifesto against capital punishment, rendered more effective by staging it at such a sensational situation. "I think," Perry's/Capote's oration explodes, "it's a helluva thing to take a life in this manner. I don't believe in capital punishment, morally or legally." (p.381) Capote, here, is much in the Dickensian way of staging a melodramatic scene by making Perry a mouthpiece for his own beliefs and views. Second, it is too hard for the reader to accept Perry's public apology for his crime in view of his former point on this point. "Am I sorry?", retorted Perry to his friend Cullivan, "I'm not. I don't feel anything about it. I wish I did. But nothing about it bothers me a bit." (p.326)*

*Having staged the 'spectacle', the narrative proceeds to interpellate textually the reader as a gazer, who, by now, is ready to experience a reversal of cathartic expectations. The horse scene is a classic emotional charging scene. But the Perry scenes play the reverse. Instead of experiencing a catharsis at such moments of punishment characteristic of the classic crime narrative the reader is made to promote a feeling of sympathy for Perry. However, this radical reversal in the response that the reader is supposed to cultivate under normal conditions is not the exclusive product of these two fictional scenes. While building on each other towards an accumulative effect, these two fictional scenes are only climactical points in Capote's text-wide strategy to achieve this radical re-orientation of reader's response towards Perry in the context of social victimization and capital punishment issues. This strategy comprises: the accidents of a 'brain explosion' and the Clutters' accidental presence as victims, as well as Capote's emphasis on long legal delays.*

*The critic John Hollowell, however, cites these three narrative strategies as the possible reason for the failure of the execution scene to provide Alvin Dewey, as well as the reader, with a proper sense of catharsis in the Aristotlean sense.(20) The correlation between Dewey's response and that of the, hypothetical, reader serves two functions in Capote's policy. First, because Dewey is Capote's center*

*of consciousness at the narratological level in this segment of the text, the reader is likely to experience a sort of experiential cross-dressing with the cognitive structure the text highlights through fictionalizing at this crucial point in the text. This would ultimately results in the total immersion of the reader in the highlighted cognitive structure of narrativity. A relocation is being affected as far as the position of the reader in the narrative is concerned. The reader, by now, is internalized as an 'implied reader', who is established by the "response-inviting structures" of the text; this type of reader is assumed and created by the work itself.*

*The second function this correlation between Dewey and the reader in Capote's policy performs is to usher the reader into the threshold of the last fictional scene which is the locus for an alternative psychic release.*

*Structurally speaking, this scene is a coda to the actual story which ends properly with the execution of the two murderers. Capote choice to end with a personal vision rather than factual closure casts heavy shadows on the whole project of the nonfiction novel as implemented in *In Cold Blood* because it threatens to destabilize the very concept of factuality underlying the murder narrative Capote seeks to actualize in his work. Undoubtedly, such choice to end a factual narrative with a personal perspective is damaging to the authenticity of the work as a journalistic reportage. Apart from the authenticity of its factual accuracy, this scene is too artistic in comparison with the rest of the narrative and, worse still, imposes a heavy sense of personal or private closure on the narrative.*

*This coda displays its politics of closure even before it commences as a narrative. The "encounter," which the coda purports to recount, "had somehow for him [Dewey] more or less ended the Clutter Case." (p.382) This is important on two scores: first, it announces that this coda is one of psychic closure rather than narrative closure since it performs as a cathartic focal for the Clutter case as experienced by the narrator, who is by now the *ultra-ego* of the implied reader. This means that the sense of design completion for Dewey is a matter of temporal sequencing but rather of self-acceptance not only of the execution of Perry Smith but rather a larger stoical acceptance of death as the ultimate fact of life. Hence, the epiphanic design of this scene where Dewey is brought to a moment of sudden spiritual illumination on the nature of reality and*

his perception of it that ultimately generates the sense of tranquilizing self-reconciliation he comes to experience by the end of this scene. The scene is designed to initiate such an epiphanic effect within a larger attempt to restore the missing equilibrium into Dewey's world-view by shifting the narrative focus from the rainy darkness of the executions scene to the sunny peacefulness of the cemetery. The intensity of the executions scene and its claustrophobic space gives way to the tranquilizing calm of the more open space of Dewey's meditations which ultimately resolves itself in the peace of self-reconciliation and the restoration of the natural order of binary oppositions that shapes the world of human perception and social reality. This shift initiates a string of symbolic-allegorical patterns and images of death/life, light/darkness, sunshine/rain, country/prison, future/past, hope/despair, etc. which are but the underlying binary oppositions that were deconstructed and/or subverted, at least for Dewey, in the textual fashioning of narrativity as a dialectical model of sign production. And, hence, the restoration of balance to Dewey's world by the end of this scene.

Second, This is not a conventional coda. It is different from the one common to classic realist novels in that it does not advance the narrative temporally and progressively towards a point of emotional or experiential saturation. It rather relapses the narrative time to a point one year before the executions scene. This ultimately gives the narrative a retrospectional coloring within an unrestrictedly personal space which is meant to rationalize the shattering experience of the murder and execution narratives in terms of Dewey's, and by implication the reader's, phenomenological cognition and existential awareness. But this sort of rationalization remains cathartic at bottom because Dewey has to grasp cognitively the reality he is unable to comprehend before he comes to a full awareness of the nature of experience he passes. One such source of cathartic satisfaction for Dewey is possibly to come from the fact that Perry has outlived his victims and executioners alike as this scene tells. Indeed, almost all the major players in this narrative are now dead and rest in peace in the Valley View Cemetery: Judge Tate, who sentenced the two murderers to death, died of pneumonia the past September. Next by comes the grave of the daughter of the Clutters neighbours, the Asidas, Bonnie Jean Ashida, who was killed in a car accident. Then comes the graves of the four members of the Clutter family, and



nearby would be, a year later, the graves of their murderers. This number of deaths to be summed thusly at the end of *In Cold Blood* is reminiscent of the Senecan model of classical tragedy as practised by the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. Although *In Cold Blood* as a text does not systematically observe the conventions of tragedy as a literary genre, this textual correlation of catharsis and closure is only one instance of the transformative power of narrativity to transcend the factual restrictions of journalistic reportage into the elevation of tragedy. Such is the originality of Capote's work that it affects a transcendence of the immediate localizing restrictions of the factual reportage of the crime and its consequences into the more universalizing realms of cultural and aesthetic spaces. Indeed, it is with the annexing of this fictional coda to the factual narrative that *In Cold Blood* is framed as an American or even a human tragedy on the scale of Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) or Victor-Marie Hugo's *Les Miserables* (1852).

While this invocation of the tragic potential of *In Cold Blood* as both American and universal is an instance of the power of the aesthetic to transcend the factual in the nonfiction novel, it grounds the narrative of *In Cold Blood*, however unconscious it might be, in a signifying web of fictional and aesthetic intertextualities. In fact, this concluding scene is conscious of its fictionality as an art work as a result of this politics of intertextuality. The elegiac mood and universalizing sentiment of the grave-yard scene echoes Capote's early quotation of Thomas Gray's famous "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" whereas his double distancing of Valley View Cemetery in a multi-layered historicity in the first paragraph of this concluding scene is actually a re-writing of the opening paragraph of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850):

*The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. (21)*

Capote's re-writing of this paragraph plays with the rhetoric of American cultural memory. "The founders" are by now "the pioneers" and the "Utopia of human virtue" becomes the Clutters' Garden City:

*The pioneers who founded Garden City were necessarily a Sparatan people, but when the time came to establish a formal cemetery, they were determined, despite arid soil and the trouble of transporting water, to create a rich contrast to the dusty streets, the austere plains. The result, which they named Valley View, is situated above the town on a plateau of modest altitude. (p.382)*

Capote highlights Protestantism and the ethos of the American myth of success within the larger universal perspective of the biblical notions of the "garden of Eden" and "original sin" to produce a mythic potential. The Garden of Eden and the inevitability of sin and death, as symbolized by the prison and the cemetery, is a thematic the narrative of the crime invests in "Garden City" in spite of its factual basis in reality. The city really becomes the biblical "valley of ashes" which the name of the cemetery accidentally connotes. The critic Tony Tanner noted, in this respect, that Capote continues 'an old American tradition when he tries to get at the "mythic" significance of the facts', which, in the case of *In Cold Blood*, was to 'extract a black fable from contemporary reality'. Capote contributes to this tradition by producing 'a stark image of the deep doubleness of American Life'.(22) Similarly, Melvin Friedman writes that Capote was 'now entering a more authentically American tradition of story-telling than any revealed in his earlier work...We can now begin using such literary catchphrases as "Adamic myth" to explain Capote, just as we've used them up to now to explain the "great tradition" in American fiction from Cooper to Hawthorne through William Styron'.(23)

But Capote's re-writing of Hawthorne captures a crucial ideological difference. Unlike, Hawthorne's text, Capote's misses the prison. Hawthorne's puritans founded the prison and cemetery as part

*of their worldly reality but Capote's pioneers founded the cemetery only. The prison as a symbolic representation of sin antedates death as symbolized by the cemetery. Probably this because the prison in Capote's text dominates the fabrics of the factual narrative proper as a metaphor for the dysutopian reality of present-day America. The cemetery appears in the fictional scene as the ultimate closure of the prison-culture reality. This posits an aesthetics of cultural subversion where the prison as the emblematic sign of the Puritanical exercise of correction has become a signifying practice in the social fabrics of Capote's America. Capote's vision is, by no means, ethical or religious. It is rather ontological in perspective. His cemetery figures as both an Edenic garden and a place where cultural paradigms are subverted and interpellated to the rhetorics of a textual closure.*

*This Garden-Cemetery analogy brings to the fore the intentional artistry of this concluding scene as a fictional artifact. This scene is designed to bring the Edenic garden motif that extends throughout the factual narrative to its true significance in its proper cultural frame. Although this motif appears intensively in the pastoral setting and the strong overtones of agrarian republicanism, its most powerful appearance is registered in Perry's recurrent dream:*

*I'm in...a jungle. I'm moving through the trees towards a tree standing all alone. Jesus, it smells bad, that tree...Only, it's beautiful to look at—it has blue leaves and diamonds hanging everywhere...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...What it comes down to is I want the diamonds more than I'm afraid of the snake. So I go to pick one, I have the diamond in my hand, I'm pulling on it, when the snake lands on top of me... [and] starts to swallow me. (pp. 109-110)*

*However, just as Perry is about to be devoured by the snake, a bird, a 'yellow sort of parrot'" lifts him off to an Edenic garden: And*

afterwards the blessed ascent! Ascension to a paradise... "A real place. Like out of a movie. Maybe that's where I did see it—remembered it from a movie. Because where else would I have seen a garden like that?" (p.111). Stripped of the moral supports of virtue, Perry's desire to pluck the fruit of this dangerous tree registers his corruption within the cultural paradigm which defines his social identity. For Perry, the Hollywood image of Eden is not a place of spiritual redemption; rather it offers only material and social rewards. In one version of the dream, the ascension is 'merely "a feeling", a sense of power, of unassailable superiority. In another, the garden is replete with unlimited food. 'And listen—it's every bit free. I mean, I don't have to be afraid to touch it, and it won't cost a cent' (p.111 ). Relieved of the burden of temptation, the imagined Eden is a place of unlimited riches and power. Perry's quest for a paradisaical existence is thoroughly commercialized like the "eyes of doctor T.J.Ecklburg" in F.Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) which renders God into a mere commercial advertisement. Perry's garden is a mere dream of wish-fulfillment, a product of a wounded ego. It comprises the queer elements of revenge-desire and an ascension to a higher animalistic state of existence as a resistance of the societal politics of exclusion exercised on Perry.

It is no coincidence that the marginalized Perry does not exist in Valley View Cemetery. Death, whether literal or metaphorical, is no longer a liberation of subjectivity. The politics of exclusion is so powerful that it affects a relocation of the cemetery/garden to a safe temporal distance from the elimination of the two murderers as configured in the narrative space of a flashback. The garden is overshadowed by the rhetoric of societal exclusion. It becomes another site of exclusion, another spectacle for the inscription of the dominant cultural paradigm within the signifying space of textuality.

Another such gardenic inscription politics can be traced in this fictionalized coda in the narrative space of the 'return-path thread' at the very end of this coda: " Then, starting home, [Dewey] walked toward the trees, and under them, leaving behind him the big sky, the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat." (p.384) This poetical invocation of the garden at this crucial point of self-reconciliation brings the narrative backward to its poetical opening in which Capote reconstructs Holcomb as a kind of pastoral idyll. This serves to transcend the ordinary experience of the factual narrative into the

*enriching realm of myth-making via the power of framing. The simple and conventional crime narrative becomes an allegorical representation of a cultural myth. The critic Masuad Zavarzadeh hits on this point when he says: “ the town itself gradually loses its geographical solidity and becomes an emblem of quintessential America, where what happens is less a random murder than a collision between forces and ideas which have shaped the American Dream.”(24)*

*Apart from this mythic significance, the return to the garden is also a myth of origins. It serves two scores on this account: it, first, affects a return to a state of social innocence, away from the state of experience the murder narrative initiates in the virginal world of Holcomb and Garden City. Secondly, it is employed as a politics of textual re-stabilization whereby peace and equilibrium are restored to the world of *In Cold Blood*. The peace of this garden that the “foreign sounds” shattered at the beginning of the narrative is finally restored in the grave-yard by a return to the state of innocence in the temporal/memory space of the garden/cemetery.*

*This, however, is not the only politics that Capote employs here to affect such a restoration. The elegiac invocation of Nancy Clutter climaxes this gardenic meeting with Sue Kidwell is another means to affect this restoration. This invocation of Nancy brings the four fictionalized scenes into a sharp two-to-two division which is meant to epitomize the conflict inside Capote himself over the subject of his work. The siding with Nancy represents what is normally cultivated as a typical communal response whereas sympathizing with Perry is a stark breach of the communal protocols of consensus over what is typically normal. Such a view that relates the element of fictionality to the divided self of the author has radical implications for the re-interpretation of Capote’s conventionally held sympathizing position with Perry in this supposedly all-objective narrative. The division of these four fictionalized scenes into two neat contrary states that co-exists together shapes capote’s divided attitude to his subject. The pattern in which these four scenes occurs testifies to this divided response or else why should Capote fictionalizes a whole scene to invoke elegiacally the memory of Nancy in the time he was supposedly trying hard to enlist the reader’s sympathy for Perry. To fictionalize self-reconciliation, then, requires another complementary act of fictionalizing in which Nancy’s memory and its usual communal*

*nostalgic rhetorics are invoked. The choice of Nancy, in this respect, is significant because that girl represents all that the community prizes. In addition to her innocent sweetness, Nancy has a strong social character:*

*Where she found the time, and still managed to “practically run that big house” and be a straight-A student, the president of her class, a leader in the 4-H program and the Young Methodists League, a skilled rider, an excellent musician (piano, clarinet), an annual winner at the county fair (pastry, preserves, needlework, flower arrangement). (p.29)*

*The politics of cultural-imaging is evident in the construction of a note of cultural nostalgia in the fashioning of Nancy’s character: “how a girl not yet seventeen could haul such a wagonload and do so without “brag,” with, rather, merely a radiant jauntiness, was an enigma the community pondered, and solved by saying, “She’s got character, Gets it from her old man.” (p.29) She is actually an endearing image of the traditionally Agrarian idealized figure of the American girl of the Republican era. Although Mr. Clutter might be a more typical representative cultural image, Nancy has the added advantage of innocence to appeal to a far powerful emotional response from the reader.*

*But this is not to say that the tensions of authorial self-conflict are totally resolved into the harmonies of self-reconciliation. On the contrary, the tensions are only submerged beneath the shining surface of narrativity. Capote makes this clear in his reply to an interviewer’s skeptical questioning of the factual authenticity of this ending :*

*I’m still very much haunted by the whole thing. I have finished the book, but in a sense I haven’t finished it: it keeps churning around in my head. It particularizes itself now and then, but not in the sense that it brings about a total conclusion. It’s like the echo of E.M.Forster’s Malabar Caves, the*

*echo that's meaningless and yet it's there:  
one keeps hearing it all the time. (25)*

*In spite of its deep tone of reticence, this confession betrays overtones of parabolic implications. The echo of truth can never be captured but inscribed regardless of how perfect is the factual account. One way to materialize such an inscription is through the act of fictionalizing.*

*This inescapability of fictionality in the nonfiction novel would ultimately demands the re-writing of the nonfiction novel textual paradigm in such a way as to legitimize its domestication at the level of the narrative discourse. and the cognitive map of reader's response.*

### Notes

1. Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p.305.
2. Phillip K. Tompkins, 'In Cold Fact', in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood: A Critical Handbook* , ed. by I. Malin (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1966), p. 45-46.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 53-54.
5. Gerald Clarke, *Capote: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), pp. 358-59.
6. Capote as quoted in Clarke, p. 359.
7. George Plimpton, 'The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel,' *New York Times Review of Books*, January 16, 1966, p. 2.
8. Capote as quoted in Jack de Bellis, *Visions and Revisions: Capote's In Cold Blood*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 7 (Sep. 1979), p.530.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Plimpton, p.2.
11. Philip K. Tompkins, "In Cold Facts", in Malin, p. 58.
12. Richard Walsh , 'Fictionality and Mimesis: Between Narrativity and Fictional Worlds', *Narrative*, 11 (Jan. 2003), p.111.
13. Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. R. Canary and H. Kozicki, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 53.
14. Philip K. Tompkins, "In Cold Facts", in Malin, p. 57-58.
15. Plimpton, p.3.
16. Helen S Garson, *Truman Capote*. (NY: Ungar, 1980), p.50.

17. William L. Nance, *The Worlds of Truman Capote* (NY: Stein & Day, 1970), p.211.
18. Trenton Hickman, 'The Last to See Them Alive: Panopticism, The Supervisory Gaze, and Catharsis in Capote's *In Cold Blood*,' *Studies in the Novel*, 37 (Winter 2005), p. 465.
19. *Ibid.*
20. John Hollowell, "Capote's *In cold blood* : the search for meaningful design ", in *Truman Capote* , ed. Harol Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), p.109.
21. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Holt,Rinehart & Winston,1961), p.44.
22. Tony Tanner, 'Death in Kansas' in *Malin*, p. 99.
23. Melvin J. Friedman, "Towards an Aesthetic: Truman Capote's Other Voices," in *I. Malin*, p. 165.
24. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *The Mythopoetic Reality:The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,1976), p.116.
25. Plimpton, p.2.

### Bibliography

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Truman Capote*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002.

Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences*. New York: Random House, 1965

Canary, R. and H. Kozicki, eds. *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

Clarke, Gerald. *Capote: a biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

DeBellis, Jack. "Visions and Revisions: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 7 (1979): 519-36.

Garson, Helen S. *Truman Capote*. New York: Ungar, 1980.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Hickman, Trenton. 'The Last to See Them Alive: Panopticism, The Supervisory Gaze, and Catharsis in Capote's *In Cold Blood*,' *Studies in the Novel*, 37 (Winter 2005), 465-476.

Malin, Irving, ed. *Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood": A Critical Handbook*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1968.

Nance, William L. *The Worlds of Truman Capote*. NY: Stein & Day, 1970.



*Plimpton, George, 'The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel,' New York Times Review of Books, January 16, 1966, 2-3.*

*Walsh, Richard . 'Fictionality and Mimesis: Between Narrativity and Fictional Worlds', Narrative, 11 (Jan. 2003), 110-121.*

*Zavarzadeh, Mas'ud. The Mythopoetic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.*