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The Works of Truman Capote

by

Craig M. Goad

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DAYLIGHT AND DARKNESS, DREAM AND DELUSION:

The Works of Truman Capote

by

Craig M. Goad*

I

Outgrowing the Legend

Seldom in the history of the publishing industry has a book aroused more commentary, criticism, and controversy than Truman Capote's "non-fiction novel," *In Cold Blood,* and perhaps none other has ever so loudly proclaimed a writer's intention to establish himself as one of the major figures in the literature of his time. Before the publication of *In Cold Blood,* it was possible, if not accurate, to dismiss Capote as a minor writer, limited by a precious style and unappealing subject matter, whose importance was exaggerated by skillful press-agentry. After *In Cold Blood,* it is still possible to dislike and to disapprove of everything about Capote and his writing, but it is difficult to ignore him while retaining a stance of objectivity. *In Cold Blood,* if nothing else he has ever written, has made Truman Capote important in the literature of the mid-twentieth century.

The literary world awaited *In Cold Blood* with interest, if not breathless anticipation, for several years. As early as June of 1962, Mark Schorer had announced Capote's intention to publish a ". . . re-creation of a brutal Kansas murder and its consequences."[1] By the time the first installment of the serialization of the book appeared in September 27, 1965, in the *New Yorker,* its financial success was assured, and high critical praise soon followed, along with a lesser number of qualified statements of approval, and several attacks. Interviews with Capote, and cover stories about him and his book proliferated, as did the inevitable arguments about whether the book was really a "new form" and whether the facts were really and literally true. During the controversy, *In Cold Blood* stayed at or near the top of the best-seller list, a triumph of pre-publication publicity—a fact which, as George Garrett has put it should not ". . . be allowed to add or detract from anything."[2]

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*Mr. Goad is an Instructor in English at Northwest Missouri State College, Maryville. Portions of this study originated as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia.

[1]Mark Schorer, "Introduction to *Selected Writings of Truman Capote,*" p. xii.

[2]George Garrett, "Crime and Punishment in Kansas: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood,*" *The Hollins Critic,* III (February, 1966), 2.

The uproar caused by *In Cold Blood* and its subsequent massive sales represented a kind of symbolic coming full circle for Truman Capote's literary career. Seventeen years before *In Cold Blood,* Capote's first book, *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* was awaited with the same expectation and greeted with the same praise and blame. In June of 1947, *Life* magazine published a feature story on promising young writers, the first page of which was dominated by a photograph of Truman Capote, seated on a plush divan and surrounded by exotic antiques.[3] At that time he had published nothing more important than a few relatively minor short stories; furthermore, established novelists like Jean Stafford, Gore Vidal, Calder Willingham, and Thomas Heggen were pictured in smaller photographs in the back pages of the article. No one has ever known just how Capote arranged for the dominant picture, but it was typical of the kind of news magazine coverage he was to receive during his career. To the popular mind, Truman Capote was simply more interesting than better established and more prolific novelists.

Despite the public attention accorded him, Capote has been largely ignored by scholarly critics. As Paul Levine has pointed out, Capote has been considered a writer whose reputation is based on skillful advertising rather than skillful writing.[4] The most persistent objections to Capote's work have been its refusal to concern itself with topics of social importance and its preoccupation with the grotesque character and the irrational mind. This attitude, from which Capote's reputation with certain scholars has never fully recovered, was best summed up by the *Time* magazine reviewer who praised the child-like perceptions of some of the stories in *A Tree of Night and Other Stories,* adding that Capote's ". . . future would look wider if he could break away from the overripe magnolia and do more on bread and meat material."[5] The sexual perversion manifest in Capote's earliest work also distressed critics. An earlier *Time* found that the theme of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was ". . . calculated to make the flesh crawl," and that ". . . the distasteful trappings of its homosexual theme overhang it like Spanish moss."[6] Another critical error was the tendency to identify Capote with the protagonists of his works. For example, John Aldridge flatly declared that the photograph of Capote on the dust jacket of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* represented a fusion of Truman Capote and Joel Knox, the book's main character.[7] As has been pointed out, such attacks were ". . . more personal than literary," since whatever an author's preferences in companionship, clothing, or cars may be, they have nothing to do with what he has put on paper.[8] Yet it has been difficult to separate the image of Capote reclining on that famous couch from Capote the stylist and storyteller.

In Cold Blood has been responsible for a major alteration in Capote's literary status, for it is difficult in this time and place to deny a book

[3]John Chamberlin, "Young U. S. Writers," *Life,* XXII (June 2, 1947), 75.
[4]Paul Levine, "Truman Capote: The Revelation of the Broken Image," in *Recent American Fiction,* p. 53.
[5]"Private Light," *Time,* LIII (March 14, 1949), 113.
[6]"Spare the Laurels," *Time,* LI (January 26, 1948), 102.
[7]John W. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation,* p. 199.
[8]Levine, *op. cit.,* p. 153.

which deals with the very roots of one incidence of senseless violence, the likes of which fill the daily headlines. It is even more difficult to equate the very suave, very sophisticated Truman Capote with either the ultra-bourgeois Herbert Clutter family or their sadistic murderers. In a sense, *In Cold Blood* is a culmination of a facet of Capote's talent which has been obvious from the very first of his career. Hicks has pointed out the duality of Capote's talent, stating that there are really two Capotes: the one most often identified in the public mind with the grotesques and mental aberrations and with gentle stories about precocious children, and the other, less well-known Capote, ". . . the shrewd, alert, sophisticated reporter of events in the 'real' world."[9] The latter Capote is the author of numerous travel articles and sketches, some of which were published in *Local Color* in 1950; of the extended captions for a collection of Richard Avedon photographs, published as *Observations* in 1959; and the better-known report of the traveling company of *Porgy and Bess* on tour in Russia, *The Muses Are Heard*, printed first in the *New Yorker* and published in book form in 1956. *In Cold Blood* seems not quite so startlingly out of character with Capote's past work if considered in the light of these earlier non-fiction works. Yet, surprisingly enough, *In Cold Blood* has more in common with Capote's fiction than with his non-fiction, and the basic purpose of this present study is to examine this relationship.

The entire scope of Capote's contribution to American literature has needed a re-evaluation long before now, but particularly after the publication of *In Cold Blood*. Some attempts have been made in this direction. For example, Garrett has pointed out certain of the similarities between *In Cold Blood* and Capote's fiction, particularly the likeness of Perry Edward Smith to the protagonists of the earlier fiction, but his analysis, while both sound and thought-provoking, is insufficient (and necessarily so) to deal properly with the light which the fiction casts upon *In Cold Blood*, and, equally important, with the increased illumination given the fiction by the "non-fiction novel."[10]

Just as the writings of Capote divide into fiction and non-fiction rather uneasily and with much overlapping, so his fictional style divides into two segments, complementary and integrated. Critics have separated these into nocturnal and daylight styles, or more simply, dark and light.[11] These are convenient tags, useful if kept in their proper perspective. Capote's non-fiction style is coexistent with and complementary to his fictional style; at times, the fictional is indistinguishable from the non-fictional. Capote's style may be best examined in terms of Schorer's germinal essay, "Technique as Discovery," which stresses the importance of ". . . the uses to which language, as language, is put to express the quality of the experience in question. . . ."[12] Any attempt to discover what a work of fiction means and how it comes to have that

[9]Granville Hicks, "The Story of an American Tragedy," *Saturday Review*, XLIX (January 22, 1966), 35.

[10]Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See, also, pp. 11-12.

[11]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 154; Ihab Hassan *Radical Innocence*, p. 231.

[12]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in *Approaches to the Novel*, p. 251.

meaning must necessarily attempt to understand the tools used in its creation: the point of view, the delineation of character, and the actual forms and rhythms of the narrative language. For this reason, this study will deal, first, with the stylistic portion of Capote's work. The division of styles into the daylight and nocturnal modes initially will be considered, with special emphasis placed on the relation of Capote's fiction to the specific continuous form of the romance. Since the delineation of character is one of the most important points of differentiation between the romance and other forms, the next area for consideration will be that of the individual character, in both the nocturnal and daylight modes. Finally, the first portion of this study will treat the actual use of language in the fiction of Capote, in an attempt to show that a fusion of style and content actually occurs in his works; and will seek to demonstrate how this fusion may be seen as it expresses the various ambiguities of theme with which Capote is concerned in his writing.

Using this dichotomy of style as a point of departure, the following two chapters will discuss the works which comprise the nocturnal world and the daylight world, respectively. The fifth chapter will show the merging of the dark and light worlds in *In Cold Blood*. It will treat the material of the book as factual, but will seek to demonstrate that by the use of precise detail, Capote has given a fuller and more important statement of the philosophical and mythical themes which are apparent in his earlier works. When these themes are clearly understood, all of the works of Capote can be seen in a new light which shows them to occupy a more important position in the scope of modern American literature than had previously been accorded to them.

II

A Semantic Paganini

Critics agree almost universally that Truman Capote is one of the most skillful prose stylists of this or any other century. The division of critical opinion has been over the uses to which he puts this style. Some have found the intense stylistic sophistication and technical virtuosity merely a disguise which only partly covers a lack of real meaning or wisdom.[13] Others have found the style ". . . a various prose, equally at ease . . . in situations of dark and frightful nightmare, and of extravagant comedy."[14] Capote began to write professionally almost at exactly the same time that technique began to be heavily emphasized in American fiction.[15] As the second World War ended, so did the dominance of the "realistic" novel; and the newer writers turned away from the ponderous prose and "social-consciousness" of writers like Steinbeck and Dos Passos, and toward the technique-conscious writers like James and Proust.[16] The need to express the new emotions of the post-war world also forced writers to seek a method of expressing themselves in the stream of consciousness techniques of Joyce and in the haunted world of Kafka.[17] The writers of the middle and late 1940's, having seen the failure of the protest novel to stop the world's downward plunge from depression to war to the atomic age, began to create private worlds of their own, some relevant only to themselves; some others to patterns of ritual and myth more basic than the temporary social and cultural milieu. That these worlds often varied between the areas of grim nightmares and facile comedy is perhaps not surprising.

Capote's fiction partakes of both these worlds, as Levine has pointed out: ". . . Capote's stories inhabit two worlds – that of the realistic, colloquial, often humorous daytime and that of the dreamlike, detached, and inverted nocturnal world."[18] Levine states, as well, that the lighter and more humorous stories are told in first person narrative with the focus on the exterior of the individual, while the nocturnal stories are narrated in the third person and are concerned with the internal workings of the mind.[19] Hassan notes that Capote's first two major works of fiction, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *The Grass Harp*, illustrate, respectively, the nocturnal and daylight sides of his writing, and that the chronological progression from earlier works to later ones reflects Capote's deepening awareness of self and world.[20] In both worlds, Capote maintains complete freedom to shift back and forth

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[13]Isaac Rosenfeld, "Twenty-Seven Stories," *Partisan Review*, XVI (July, 1949), 755.
[14]Schorer, "McCullers and Capote. Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 97.
[15]Chester Eisinger, *Fiction of the Forties*, p. 231.
[16]Alberto Moravia, "Two American Writers," *Sewanee Review*, LXVII (Summer, 1960), 477-478.
[17]Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
[18]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
[19]*Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.
[20]Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

through varying levels of reality, with only the perfection of the prose style (in the more limited sense of *style*) as the connective factor.[21]

The facility with which Capote makes these changes in the levels of reality is one reason that his more perceptive critics have realized that his fiction is in the tradition of the romance. "The idea of romance," writes Hassan, "informed by the modern techniques of dream symbolism and analysis, suggests the general quality of Capote's work."[22] Capote has objected strenuously to those who call him a writer of fantasy, but has, at the same time, stated that Hawthorne was responsible for getting American fiction off to a good start.[23] This seeming contradiction is resolved when one realizes the essential difference between fantasy and romance. While fantasy has come to mean fiction divorced from the actual human condition, romance is used by Capote and his critics to denote a form rooted in human experience, wherein the author may ". . . so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture."[24] In point of fact, Capote's excursions into the subconscious often involve more than the darkening or lightening shadows, which, as Hawthorne admitted, was no serious literary crime.[25] More recent critics would agree that going beyond the bounds of sight alterations of normal life is hardly a literary offense, but the very thing from which romance takes its nature.

One of Capote's most important technical devices for moving out of the social world into the personal one is the dream. Frye has stated that the romance, in its true literary form, suggests analogies to the dream and that both the nightmare and the wish that comes true are to be found in romance form, from folk tale to commercial motion picture.[26] Both good and evil are given shape by the dream, although the latter is perhaps more often depicted. Dreams become greatly important to the characters of Capote's fictional world. In a story which is centered around the dream, Sylvia, the protagonist of "Master Misery," literally loses the will to live when she has sold all of her dreams to the mysterious Mr. Revercomb. Having lost her dream world, Sylvia no longer has any identity as a person.[27] Vincent comes face to face with the true nature of his character in the frightful nightmare, the climax of "The Headless Hawk." Joel Knox, the central character of *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* sustains himself with dreams throughout the first part of his enforced stay at Scully's Landing, and then finds his dreams so twisted by reality that he can no longer derive comfort from them. Judge Cool, one of the outcasts of *The Grass Harp,* remarks that ". . . a man who doesn't dream is like a man who doesn't sweat: he stores up a lot of poison."[28] The statement is characteristic of the lighter style's vision of the dream, as a

[21]Mark Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present,* p. 97.

[22]Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 231.

[23]Pati Hill, "The Art of Fiction, XVII: TC," *Paris Review,* XVI (Spring-Summer, 1957), 47.

[24]Nathaniel Hawthorne "Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables,*" p. xi.

[25]*Loc. cit.*

[26]Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism,* p. 107.

[27]Levine, *op. cit.,* p. 157.

[28]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night,* p. 83.

useful way of working off the problems of life. In the nocturnal stories, the dream reveals the vision of evil to the characters themselves and to the reader.

Capote's characterizations are also deeply rooted in the techniques of romance and, as such, have been subject to a great deal of adverse criticism. The author of the *Time* magazine review of *A Tree of Night and Other Stories* thought the children of Capote's fiction delightful, but stated that his adults were lacking in reality and that he thought them ". . . scornfully and crudely caricatured."[29] O'Conner has objected that Capote's children are really midgets with children's faces, and that what would normally be thought of as "nice" people are in Capote's works perverted, eccentric, or demented.[30] Aldridge feels that Capote's characters live only on the printed page, and have no reality except in th context of the story.[31] This internal world is, according to Aldridge, typical of Capote and other writers like him, because they have been unable to accept or even to understand the realities of the modern social world.[32] In the eyes of such critics, Capote fails in his characterizations, because his people are not real enough; they lack the roundness of personality that a character in novelistic fiction should have; they are too often only character types.

Such criticism demonstrates the ultimate extension of excoriating an author for not writing to suit a critic's particular taste in fiction. When examined in terms of their function, the characters of Capote's fiction are often brilliantly effective. This effectiveness is, however, in terms of the romance, not the novel. Frye's discussion of romance is particularly helpful in dealing with such critically erroneous attitudes:

> The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the concept of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes . . . . That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their *personae* or social masks . . . . The romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.[33]

This description of the romance defines so precisely the character of Capote's fiction that it almost seems to have been written for that purpose, and applies, in the main, to both his short stories and his "novels." It answers some of the most severe criticism made of Capote and leaves the way open for a better understanding both of his characters and his fiction

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[29]"Private Light," *Time, LIII* (March 14, 1949), 113.
[30]William Van O'Connor, "The Grotesque in Modern American Fiction," *CE*, XX (April, 1959), 343.
[31]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
[32]*Ibid.*, p. 197.
[33]Frye, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-305.

in general. Understood in these terms, Capote's characters can fulfill their symbolic and archetypal functions without being "real people."

Malin offers a slightly different reason for the unreality of Capote's characters, but basically it is similar to Frye's differentiation between novel and romance. Malin sees the characters in terms of their narcissistic love, one which does not admit of roundness of character.[34] Such narcissism is, of course, one of the major qualities which distinguishes what is called the Gothic spirit in American literature. Indeed, so closely related are Gothicism, narcissism, and the romance that Schorer would equate romance directly with Gothicism.[35] Frye has pointed out that there has been a general tendency to look upon both romance and Gothicism as earlier and, consequently, more juvenile and less satisfactory literary forms and, hence, automatically inferior to the novel.[36] Such an attitude is founded upon the critically indefensible position that the more modern a thing is the better it must be.

A Gothic or romantic flatness is displayed in the earliest of Capote's important short stories, "A Tree of Night." Kay, a college girl returning home from the funeral of an uncle, meets two sideshow freaks who enact a perverse parody of the burial and resurrection of Lazarus.[37] Overwhelmed by the memories of childhood terror which the two freaks recall, she surrenders herself to them and to the primitive evil which they represent. None of the characters may be said to have a personality as such; they are merely tools for telling the story. Capote has said, "All I want to do is tell the story, and sometimes it's best to choose a symbol."[38] Therefore, Kay and the two freaks are symbolic representations of opposing kinds of human existence, and their destructive interaction produces the complication and resolution of the story. The reader does not need much information about their backgrounds, their past, or their future. Their symbolic, if single-dimensional, existence is all that is required for the functioning of the story. This is equally apparent in many of the other characters of Capote's short stories. They exist, not as real people in plausible social situations, but as representatives of more abstract positions and ideas.

The same holds true for the characters of Capote's longer fiction. Aldridge in particular has objected to the *created* quality of the characters of *Other Voices, Other Rooms.* "They belong," he says, "eternally to the special illusion Capote has created; outside it, they do nothing and are nothing . . . . The real world should, by rights, be part of the illusion; but it is not and cannot be."[39] In one sense he is right: Capote's characters do exist in a world different from the social world which Aldridge believes so important for the creation of fiction. On the other hand, the characters can, and do, function as representatives of experiences which

[34]Irving Malin, *New American Gothic*, p. 7.
[35]Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 97.
[36]Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 306.
[37]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
[38]Rochelle Girson, "48's Nine," *Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII* (February 12, 1949), 13.
[39]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

are more basic than manners or politics. As Levine has pointed out, Joel Knox's search is a basic quest for identity, intertwined with his search for a father.[40] His search may also be seen as the most basic of all quests – the search for someone who will love him.[41] As a boy seeking a father, Joel joins the company of Telemachus and Stephen Dedalus; as a person seeking love, he is typical of the lonely and loveless characters who people so much of modern fiction, and, indeed, so much of modern life. That he is not a figure drawn from daily life is less important than the fact that he is able to carry the weight of the metaphorical and symbolic meanings which are attached to him. Joel is not a normal member of any normal society, but rather a symbol of everyone who struggles against overwhelming odds to establish an identity and to find love.

In his lighter mood and style, Capote creates such charming and improbable characters as Miss Bobbit, the heroine of "Children on Their Birthdays," who restores vitality to a sleepy Southern town, only to be run over by the six o'clock bus from Mobile; Dolly Talbo, whose refusal to let her dropsy cure be commercialized causes her to lead an eclectic collection of social misfits into the sanctuary of a treehouse in *The Grass Harp;* and the aging cousin of "A Christmas Memory" who bakes fruitcakes to send to missionaries and President Roosevelt. None of these characters, despite their lovable natures, is, properly speaking, a person. They represent abstract qualities of non-conformity, charity, understanding, and other virtues. They exist, not as people, but as representations of the way people ought to be if only the world would let them be so.

Capote's supreme creation in the daylight mode is "Miss Holiday Golightly, Traveling," of *Breakfast at Tiffany's.* Kazin praises ". . . the purely external side of Holly's character . . . ." but finds that her inner life was badly done, and that the Southern orphan who was also part of Holly was never given a clear enough delineation or focus.[42] Hassan has pointed out, however, that her improbability is the very thing which Holly uses to criticize the society in which she moves.[43] Principally because she is such as unreal blend of the naive and the sophisticated, she can mock the people from whom she makes her living – at the rate of fifty dollars for powder room change and fifty dollars for cab fare. The refusal of her image to focus prevents the more sentimental parts of the story from becoming mawkish and allows the ending of the story to retain its tension. If Holly's sophistication were complete, the reader could be assured that Holly would always stay on her feet by falling on her back. If the naive, easily hurt Holly had emerged as the dominant facet of her personality, her final flight to Brazil could only be tragic. By remaining somewhere between the two extremes, Holly is allowed to function as both a symbol of irreverent rebellion and a sensitive critic of her society. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is the least Gothic and symbolic of Capote's works, although both Gothic self-love and conscious symbolism

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[40]Levine, *op. cit.,* p. 161.
[41]Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present,* p. 100.
[42]Alfred Kazin, *Contemporaries,* p. 251.
[43]Ihab Hassan, "Birth of a Heroine," *Prairie Schooner,* XXXIV (Spring, 1960), 79.

make up part of the totality of the work, and Holly is most nearly human of his characters. Both the individual consciousness and the social milieu are represented in the characters of this book, and perhaps for this reason it was more generally praised by the magazines which represent the popular culture than any of Capote's previously published books.

Consideration must also be given, here, to Capote's non-fictional characters, who present an interesting comparison with his fictional creations. In discussing *The Muses Are Heard,* his first book-length venture into the field of non-fiction writing, Capote said that he saw very little difference between his fictional and non-fictional styles, adding that reportage deals in a large measure with surfaces.[44] Such a comment is particularly interesting, especially if one considers the flat surfaces of some of Capote's fictional characters, and it helps to show more fully the inter-relatedness of the two forms.

Although the characters of *The Muses Are Heard* are drawn directly from life, from people with whom Capote was directly and fairly intimately associated over a period of months, they are often less characters than types. They display only that facet of their character which is most interesting or fits best with the overall impression that Capote was seeking to give. Another member of the group who visited Russia with the *Porgy and Bess* company objected to Capote's treatment of the Americans as ". . . lurid, overdrawn, glib . . . ," adding the extravagance of Capote's portraits of the Americans cast doubts on the accuracy of his portrayal of the Russians.[45] Such a charge is the natural result of symbolic, stylized characters. Obviously, all of the members of the cast and its accompanying entourage had personalities with more than one side; they were, after all, human beings. In rendering them, Capote chose to give only one particular side of many of them, perhaps because it was the side most often visible, perhaps because he had a specific point to make and could make it most effectively by showing one part of a personality at the expense of others. Such a technique is simply the natural process of artistic selection.

One of Capote's most full and, in many ways, most exciting characterizations is his profile of movie star Marlon Brando. According to Capote, the interview with Brando was the result of a bet with some literary friends. At the time, he had been contending that any kind of journalism could be raised to the level of art, and he was challenged to prove his theory by making art out of the notoriously mundane kind of interview so popular in the movie magazines.[46] The result, which encompasses some forty pages of text in *Selected Writings of Truman Capote,* is perhaps the most professional and most revealing article ever done about a Hollywood personage. In this account, Brando retains something of his symbolic quality as a "Star," but also emerges as a human being. The study is, according to Schorer, ". . . one of the most brilliant pieces

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[44]Hill, *op. cit.,* pp. 41-42.

[45]Horace Sutton, "Capote in Muscovy," *Saturday Review,* XXXIX (December 8, 1956), 16.

[46]Long, *op. cit.,* p. 173.

of reporting in our time."[47] Whether Capote proved his point and succeeded in raising the interview to the level of art remains more a matter of personal opinion than demonstrable fact; however, as an isolated characterization of a man, it is indeed outstanding.

Capote has contributed little in the way of technical innovations to creative writing. He is not a linguistic experimenter like Joyce or Stein, preferring rather to adapt conventional tools to the purpose of his themes. He seeks perfection of established techniques, not the invention of new ones. The technique which Capote has most thoroughly perfected is that of prose style, in the more limited sense of the use of rhythm, balance, tempo, and phrasing. Capote refers to style as the mirror of an artist's sensibilities, and his concern with the precise placing of a comma or a semicolon has become almost as legendary as his public personality.[48] ". . . I believe a story can be wrecked by a faculty rhythm in a sentence (especially if it occurs toward the end) or a mistake in paragraphing, even punctuation."[49] Most critics would agree that Capote seldom wrecks a story with a faulty rhythm; fellow author Norman Mailer says of Capote: ". . . he is the most perfect writer of my generation, he writes the best sentences, word for word, rhythm for rhythm. I would not have changed two words in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. . . ."[50] Even critics who have only contempt for Capote's subject matter and philosophy generally grant his stylistic brilliance.

Yet, all the critical praise which has been showered on Capote's use of language has done little to clarify exactly what makes his style so effective; critics have merely said, "Capote has a wonderful style," and dismissed the subject. Part of this critical refusal to investigate deeply the reasons for Capote's stylistic success probably stems from the long-standing belief that style is inherent to a writer, that one writer will have a good style and another a bad one, just as one will have blue eyes and the other brown. It may also be the result of the notion, strengthened by the "social consciousness" writers and not yet disposed of, that subject matter is the important thing and that style is removed from the subject and is only a purely mechanical method of getting the message across to the reader.[51] Capote's stylistic success can only be understood, as can the stylistic success of any writer, when one arrives at the understanding that certain works are called "great" or "works of art," because their forms equate perfectly with their content, and because their style provides an analysis and an evaluation of their subject matter, thus avoiding the need for external criteria of forms, morals, or any other outside norm by which they must be judged.[52] Guided by this dictum, it is possible to evaluate Capote's work without reference to the pre-existing mythical and ritualistic forms which it has been shown to partake of, and without

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[47]Mark Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 106.

[48]Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[49]*Ibid.*, p. 37-38.

[50]Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 416.

[51]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in *Approaches to the Novel*, p. 250.

[52]*Ibid.*, p. 265.

concern for any economic, social, or moral positions it may take or values it may have. While such standards are, of course, important in judging the totality of his works, stylistic considerations form another norm which may be used independently of standards which might involve personal prejudice.

A limited number of examples may be used to demonstrate Capote's use of style to explore and define his thematic material. In the opening section of *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* Joel approaches Noon City, a place which represents to him the beginning of the unkown. The rhythms of the prose lurch forward like the ancient pickup truck in which Joel is riding:

> A house. A grey clump of Negro cabins. An unpainted clapboard church with a rain-rod steeple, and three Holy panes of ruby glass. A sign: The Lord Jesus Is Coming! Are You Ready? A little child wearing a big straw hat and clutching tight a pail of black-berries. Over all the sun's stinging glaze . . . . Then a red-barn livery stable: horses, wagons, buggies, mules, men. An abrupt bend in the road. Noon City.[53]

This staccato rhythm recreates exactly the jumbled emotions of an uprooted thirteen year old, alone and friendless in a strange place. The images are fragmented, as sights seen from a moving vehicle always are. The listing of "horses, wagons, buggies, mules, men" provides a momentarily sustained image which is sharply broken by "An abrupt bend." These words move rapidly, and the alliterative effect of both "a" and "b" causes a natural emphasis on the shift from static images to a feeling of motion, again. The bend literally seems abrupt. The two words, "Noon City," announce that the town is suddenly in focus, that Joel is really there. Suddenly, the town has become both a physical and emotional reality.

When Joel is returned to the Landing after his last attempt to escape, he lies in a delirium compounded of terror and physical sickness. His nightmare objectifies the total loss of reality which has taken place in his world:

> Whereupon the room commenced to vibrate slightly, then more so, chairs overturned, the curio cabinet spilled its contents, a mirror cracked, the pianola, composing its own doomed jazz, held a haywire jamboree: down went the house, down into the earth, down, down, past Indian tombs, past the deepest root, the coldest stream, down, down, into the furry arms of horned children whose bumblebee eyes withstand forests of flame.[54]

This single long sentence expresses the fusion of tormented ideas into one vision of doom. By the rhythmic repetition of "down," the suggestion of both a physical fall into bondage and a psychological retreat into the innermost self is given. Mere anarchy has been loosed upon Joel's world, and the rhythmically ordered but logically incoherent phrasing perfectly expresses the descent into madness and despair.

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[53]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* p. 16.
[54]*Ibid.,* p. 205.

The subject matter and intent of "A Christmas Memory" are as exactly antithetical to *Other Voices, Other Rooms* as anything Capote has written. In a paragraph early in the story, he describes a search for a Christmas tree ". . . twice as tall as a boy." Here, Capote captures the physical reality as well as the emotion of a winter morning in language both poetic and sophisticated, yet still flawlessly childlike:

> Morning. Frozen rime lusters the grass; the sun, round as an orange and orange as hot-weather moons, balances on the horizon, burnishes the silvered winter woods. A wild turkey calls. A renegade hog grunts in the undergrowth. Soon, by the edge of knee-deep, rapid running water, we have to abandon the buggy . . . . A mile more: of chastising thorns, burs and briers that catch at our clothes; of rusty pine needles brilliant with gaudy fungus and molted feathers. Here, there, a flash, a flutter, an ecstasy of shrillings remind us that not all the birds have flown south.[55]

Each image represents a separate perception, yet these perceptions are not disjointed as were those of Joel as he entered Noon City. The show rhythm and the alliteration hold the picture together while giving the reader a chance to examine and reflect upon each individual image.

Endless examples of expert unification of theme and content, in both fiction and non-fiction, might be cited. This basic point is clear: Capote uses the devices of technique to order and define his subject matter and to give shape to the thematic materials with which he has chosen to work. With his style as a framework, Capote can investigate both the tormented inner world of the mind and the complexities of the social and moral world of modern American life. Style is the central unifying factor in Capote's art. With an understanding of this technical tool in mind, it is possible for one to move to a more complete understanding of the themes of lost identity, narcissism, the *Doppelganger*, and moral and social value which are discovered, explored, and defined by Capote's technique. With these examples clearly in mind, it is now possible to consider the thematic structures of the works which make up the nocturnal world of Capote.

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[55]Capote, *Selected Writings of Truman Capote*, p. 156.

III

The Revelation of Despair

Truman Capote's nocturnal world contains some of the most grimly frightening characters and situations of modern fiction. Doom, despair, and death surround perverts, cripples, and monsters. Everywhere there is an atmosphere of helplessness, of people cut off from all hope of redemption, of isolation from any of the good things of life. Anguish is the only motivation for any action, and the final resolution is almost always the despairing termination of all action. Capote's mutilated characters lack even a Godot for whom they can wait. Walter Ranney can only cringe in his hotel room and "think of nothing things, think of wind." Sylvia has nothing left to steal, and Kay can escape only through death in life and symbolic burial. Joel Knox finds his only comfort in a perverse relationship with a cousin who becomes both his father and his lover. "All our acts are acts of fear" is the final line of a poem which one of these characters once plagiarized, one which might serve as an epitaph for all the lonely and sick who inhabit the dark world of Truman Capote.[56]

One concern, above all others, dominates this grotesque world: the discovery of the character's true identity. This search takes many forms, and once identity is discovered, the character may take flight from it. Often the supernatural is used in these stories, because it can best symbolize the world in which a character comes face to face with his alter ego, the *Doppelganger,* which the business of ordinary society may allow him to avoid.[57] In the loneliness of a private world somewhere outside everyday life, Capote's characters meet and are destroyed by the vision of their real selves.

While the seeds of destruction of all these characters are sown by the characters themselves, it is possible to divide the nocturnal stories into two groups. The first, and smaller, category contains two stories in both of which are the elements of the supernatural prominent; they are concerned with a mysterious silver-haired child who comes to haunt a middle-aged woman, and a mysterious, sexless voice on the telephone which drives a young man into desperate flight. The second group is made up of stories in which the central characters are plagued by others until they are forced to come to terms with their real identity. In both types, the relationship between the protagonist and the force which impels him toward revelation is the same: fascinated horror, a revulsion so intermixed with attraction that flight is impossible.[58] Once the revelation of evil is made, there can be no return to the social world. Thus, Kay, in "A Tree of Night," cannot ask the conductor to find another seat for her when she is terrified by the two freaks, nor does it do Mrs.

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[56]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night,* p. 141.
[57]Schorer, introduction, *Selected Writings of Truman Capote,* p. viii.
[58]Levine, *op. cit.,* p. 156.

Miller any good to ask the landlord for help when Miriam, in the story of the same name, comes to live with her. The evil is a private one, and no one can help. It will be best to deal with the nocturnal works individually, keeping in mind the division between stories in which there is no antagonist except for the other half of the character's consciousness, and those in which another character becomes the agent for the moment of personal revelation and identification.

Capote's first short story to receive critical recognition was "Miriam," first published in 1944 and selected to appear in the O. Henry Memorial Award volume in that year. Capote has since said that he does not like "Miriam," because it is ". . . a good stunt but nothing more."[59] On the surface, "Miriam" appears to be nothing more than a horror story about a lonely woman haunted by a weird and beautiful child. Looked at in the proper perspective, however, Miriam can be seen as the hallucinatory projection of an old and lonely woman, a vision of what she should have been but never was and, now, can never be.[60]

Mrs. Miller lives alone and seems at first glance to be content. Yet, she is, without consciously realizing it, very much alone: "Her interests were narrow, she had no friends to speak of . . . . The other people in the house never seemed to notice her . . . ."[61] Then, she meets Miriam, a child of unusual beauty, quiet elegance, and mature dignity. Mrs. Miller's name, the reader soon learns, is also Miriam, and she begins at once to do things for her namesake which she would not otherwise do. After buying a theatre ticket for Miriam, Mrs. Miller says gaily: "I hope I haven't done the wrong thing."[62] Miriam maintains her dignity, and the roles of child and adult suddenly seem to be reversed.[63]

A week-long snowstorm isolates Mrs. Miller after the night on which she meets Miriam; she is out of contact with others more completely than ever, and even her sense of time becomes confused: ". . . Mrs. Miller lost track of the days: Friday was no different from Saturday and on Sunday she went to the grocery: closed, of course."[64] On Sunday night Miriam appears at Mrs. Miller's door and begins at once to make demands, first for food and, then, for a cameo brooch, a gift from Mrs. Miller's now dead husband. Powerless to resist, Mrs. Miller gives her the brooch. As Miriam leaves, she pauses long enough to shatter a vase of artificial flowers: "How sad. Aren't imitation sad," she says.[65] Mrs. Miller has been bested again. Now, she begins to dream of a shining girl in a bridal gown who leads a group of people along a desolate path.

With this dream, the story begins to focus. Miriam is a projection of Mrs. Miller's inner desires, a bright and adventurous child who leads people, in contrast to dowdy and isolated Mrs. Miller.[66] When Mrs. Miller is able to go out again, she enters a florist's shop and, although

[59]Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[60]Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 236.
[61]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night,* p. 163.
[62]*Ibid.*, p. 164.
[63]Malin, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.
[64]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night,* p. 165.
[65]*Ibid.*, p. 166.
[66]Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 236.

she cannot explain why, buys a half-dozen white roses and a vase to replace the one which Miriam has broken, although the vase seems vulgar and its price too high. Then, she buys some sweets, for Miriam has expressed a preference for glazed cherries and almond cakes. She is obviously preparing for another visit. Yet, when Miriam does come, Mrs. Miller at first refuses to let her in; eventually, the fascination grows too great, and she opens the door. Miriam has returned with a large box containing all her belongings. She has come to stay. Unable to bear this thought, Mrs. Miller rushes downstairs to summon help. But her neighbor can be of no assistance, because, when he goes to Mrs. Miller's room, he finds no one there, and Miriam's box of belongings has vanished.

It is completely obvious at this point that Miriam exists only in Mrs. Miller's imagination, the projection of desire for communication. She cannot live alone, so she has invented Miriam to fill the void.[67] Yet, she resists Miriam for the same reason that she has created her. Although the child represents what Mrs. Miller once was, or hoped to be, she also represents an impulse to destroy what Mrs. Miller is now. She cannot love this destructive impulse, even though she has created it herself, so she makes Miriam a demanding and unpleasant child, and eventually tries to flee from her.[68] Mrs. Miller's narcissistic love has led her into a circle of contradictions: she creates Miriam, a reflection of her dreams, to fill the emptiness of her life; but Miriam threatens to take command, and much as Mrs. Miller loves herself as a child, she cannot part with her adult self.

It is in the final section of the story that Mrs. Miller comes, at last, face to face with herself. She returns to her apartment, which now seems more empty than ever.

Having freed herself from Miriam, the same impulse that originally made Mrs. Miller create her begins to assert itself. After a moment in which it seems she will wholly lose touch with reality ("The room was losing shape; it was dark and getting darker . . . ."[69]), Mrs. Miller's normal adult identity appears to resume control:

> . . . now she knew she had found again the person who lived in this room, who cooked her own meals, who owned a canary, who was someone she could trust and believe in: Mrs. H. T. Miller.[70]

Then, she hears a noise from the bedroom, and as the room seems to cave in around her, the rustle of a silk dress approaches. "Mrs. Miller stiffened and opened her eyes to a dull, direct stare. 'Hello,' said Miriam."[71] The identity of Mrs. H. T. Miller has been tried and found wanting. Miriam has indeed come to live with Mrs. Miller, because her real self is too unpleasant to bear. Only by escaping into hallucinations can Mrs. Miller survive. Her regression may also be seen to symbolize the avoidance of the impending reality of death by reversion to a childlike state

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[67]Malin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[68]*Ibid.*, p. 17.
[69]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 173.
[70]*Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.
[71]*Ibid.*, p. 174.

in which death is unknown.[72] The story hinges on the confrontation with the decaying, unsatisfactory self and the ultimate despair which such a confrontation brings.

"Shut a Final Door," one of Capote's self-confessed favorites,[73] is another story in which the self is brought to face the unpleasant truth about its existence by means which at first seem supernatural. It details the destructive career of Walter Ranney, a man whose life is a history of betrayals. Through a mixture of insensitivity, aggressiveness, and unabashed cruelty, Ranny isolates himself from all normal human contact. When he has cut himself off from all those who should have been his friends, he begins to receive telephone calls: a detached, "dry and sexless" voice whispers ". . . you know me, Walter. You've known me a long time."[74] The voice is that of Ranney's alter ego, his *Doppelganger*, which has come to pass judgment on a life empty of human decency.[75] Like Poe's "William Wilson," the story can be seen to revolve around the relationship of the first self to the alter ego which has appeared.[76]

Ranney's *Doppelganger* begins to force him toward self-knowledge, a process which Ranney seeks to evade, first by flight and then by seeking solace in the arms of a club-footed woman, who is herself a type common to recent Southern literature: a person troubled by both physical crippling and loneliness.[77] Her crippling is a reflection of Ranney's mental state, but she has accepted her condition and learned to live with it. This Ranney has not yet learned to do, and another call from the voice of his alter ego sends him into flight again. Ultimately Ranney finds the truth about himself as he lies in a New Orleans hotel room, caught in the grip of what Shorer calls ". . . the paralysis that overtakes us in our most wretched dreams."[78] Recognizing his isolation, realizing that ". . . experience is a circle of which no moment can be isolated, forgotten,"[79] Ranney can only ". . . think of nothing things, think of wind."[80] He is trapped and condemned by his accusing alter ego; the voice, like Miriam, has come to stay.

The first of Capote's stories in which the self is revealed through the entrance of an outside force is "A Tree of Night," the story which gives its title to Capote's first collection. All of the characteristics of Capote's nocturnal mood are to be found in this story.[81] Its characters are a young girl, seemingly innocent but brought at last to a knowledge of guilt; an old woman; and the woman's male companion, a mute. The setting is a hot and filthy railroad car, traveling somewhere in the South. And, for the first time, the wizard man is introduced explicitly. This shadowy figure, so important to the dark side of Capote's fiction is

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[72]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 236.
[73]Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[74]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 146.
[75]Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[76]*Loc. cit.*
[77]Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," *The Georgia Review*, XII (Summer, 1958), 151.
[78]Shorer, "McGullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 99.
[79]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 148
[80]*Ibid.*, p. 149.
[81]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

". . . the bogey-man of every childhood, that formless embodiment of every formless fear, the animated threat to every assumption of security . . . . "[82]

The story begins with Kay, the protagonist of the story, waiting on the platform of a railway station; the atmosphere is one of frigidity and menace. Kay, the reader soon learns, is on her way home after attending the funeral of an uncle, a funeral at which she felt no sadness or sense of loss. She carries with her a purse with her name spelled across it in large brass letters, the symbolic importance of which will be pointed out later, when she surrenders the purse (and thus herself) at the story's end.

When Kay boards the train, she is forced to take a seat with an ugly, dwarfish woman and a deaf mute. The couple earn a meager living by traveling from town to town, performing a grotesque reenactment of the story of Lazarus. The mute, who is seemingly able to go into trances at will, is buried and dug up again in towns all over the South. The pair begin subtly to take control of Kay, with the woman giving orders to her as a parent might to a child. Yet the woman's orders are unlike a parent's; they seem designed to punish Kay for some unspecified crime.[83] Kay is frightened by the two, yet unable to break away from them. As is so often the case with Capote's characters, she is both repelled and perversely attracted by them.[84]

As the story progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that there is no love in Kay's life. She has felt no emotion at her uncle's funeral; the mute offers her a love charm, which she rejects because of his strangely obscene gestures; she flees to the platform between cars and tries to light a cigarette, but all her matches blow out. She must finally kneel and seek warmth from the lantern that burns between the two cars. The mute comes to take her back to her seat, and suddenly she realizes the cause of the nameless dread that has been building in her—the mute is like the wizard man of her childhood:

> And always there had been the unfailing threat of the wizard man: stay close to the house, child, else a wizard man'll snatch you and eat alive! He lived everywhere, the wizard man, and everywhere was danger. At night, in bed, hear him tapping at the window? Listen.[85]

Inside the car again, Kay is literally paralyzed with fear; she imagines that all of the other people may not be asleep, but, instead, unwilling or unable to help her. She is isolated from humanity, and when she offers to buy the love charm, her reason is obvious: she has neither given nor received love. Kay's lack of feeling at her uncle's funeral is symptomatic of this lovelessness, and she knows that she has strayed too far from the house. The "wizard man" has snatched her, and, in the moment of revelation Kay makes no protest when the woman takes her purse,

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[82]Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 99.
[83]Malin, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
[84]Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
[85]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 216.

thus taking away her name and identity. She can only sit quietly as the woman pulls a raincoat over her head like a shroud. For Kay, revelation and symbolic death have come at the same moment.

Revelation similarly comes too late to save Vincent, the protagonist of "The Headless Hawk," a work which has been called ". . . Capote's densest story."[86] As Schorer says,

> . . . the story depends probably more than any other on the disheveled imagery of tortured dream and hallucination, and by these means explores most explicitly the *Doppelganger* theme.[87]

Like Walter Ranney, Vincent has spent most of his life betraying those who have loved and trusted him. Capote has used a passage from Job as an epigraph, in which the theme of the story is explicitly stated, if one understands that the verses come from Job's prophesy concerning the wicked who seem to prosper on earth. A later verse from the same passage describes the revelation that comes to Vincent at the climax of the story: "The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree."[88]

Vincent is a man who belongs to nothing and no one. One day, he is confronted in the art gallery in which he works by a strange, freakish girl with a murkily symbolic painting dominated by the figure of a headless hawk, which instantly symbolizes to Vincent his own rootless life.[89] He is also attracted to the girl, because he is, as others of Capote's characters are, fascinated by the slightly crippled or deformed; he seems compelled to injure further those who are already hurt.[90] Vincent and the girl, known only as D. J., become lovers, but from their first night together the comfort D. J. brings to Vincent's lonely world is diminished by her constant preoccupation with a mysterious Mr. Destronelli. The obvious symbolism of the name, coupled with D.J.'s assertion that "Everybody knows him . . . . he looks like you, like me, like most everybody,"[91] makes it apparent that Mr. Destronelli is the wizard man, in a new disguise, perhaps, but still the ubiquitous destroyer of happiness that Kay remembered from childhood.

As D.J.'s madness becomes increasingly clear to Vincent, he withdraws further from society and into the psychotic world of the girl. In a dream that is the emotional climax of the story, Vincent sees himself dancing with all those he has betrayed; each is burdened with a manifestation of his other self. Vincent's last dancing partner is D.J., who carries as her other self a beautiful child, who says, "I am heavier than I look," to which Vincent's alter alter ego replies, "But I am heaviest of all."[92] The symbolism here, too, is fairly obvious: D.J.'s madness is a

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[86]Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 237.

[87]Mark Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, pp. 99-100.

[88]Job xxiv.20.

[89]Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 237; Levine, *op cit.*, p. 159.

[90]Mark Schorer, "McCuller and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present*, p. 99.

[91]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 184.

[92]*Ibid.*, p. 190.

heavy burden, but the weight of Vincent's guilt is heavier. As Vincent floats away from D.J., he sees in the circling, swooping headless hawk the prophesy of his own future: ". . . at last he knows there is to be no freedom."[93]

Vincent, seeing now in D.J. the reflection of this own failure,[94] destroys her painting and locks her out of the apartment, leaving a twenty dollar bill in her suitcase. But he cannot buy an immunity from fate so cheaply. J. D. begins, now, to pursue him, convinced that he is Mr. Destronelli. In the final scene of the story, Vincent, weakened by a long illness, can run no farther. D. J. comes to stand by him, but rain falls between them ". . . like a curtain of shattered glass."[95] In the shattered glass is the shattered image of Vincent, brought up against the knowledge that he is indeed Mr. Destronelli, and forever separated from D. J. and all the valuable and creative things she might have meant to him. Again, the moment of total revelation is the moment of symbolic death.

The "wizard man" takes yet another form in "Master Misery," a story which has been condemned as ". . . an ignorant and snide parody of psychoanalysis."[96] To dismiss it thus is to overlook the basic thematic intent of the story. It is probably true that there is some suggestion that psychoanalysts are masters of misery who feed on the misfortunes of others. Its basic intent is, however, the further development of the theme of hopeless revelation. Its protagonist is a girl named Sylvia, a New York secretary who shares an apartment with a girlhood friend and her husband. At once, it is obvious that Sylvia is neither happy with her living arrangements nor her job. She is in rebellion against a society which commercializes Christmas with mechanical Santas who laugh electronically in the store windows. Her first overt act of rebellion in the story occurs when she walks through Central Park after dark, although warned not to do so. Two teenage boys follow her, and she is afraid that she will be raped. Her fear of rape is important to the story structurally and symbolically, for after she escapes, her only reaction is to express her disgust with the anonymity and cruelty of New York.

On the day on which the story begins, Sylvia has taken a step toward what she thinks will make her environment more satisfactory: she has paid a visit to Mr. Revercomb, a mysterious man who buys dreams. All Sylvia has to do is tell him a dream, which his secretary takes down in shorthand, and he gives her five or ten dollars. It is both a chance to rebel against social convention and to earn money at the same time. However, she learns that all is not as cheerful as it seems when she meets Oreilly, a former seller of dreams, now a hopeless alcoholic. Oreilly calls Mr. Revercomb "Master Misery," because the latter has come to represent to him what the "wizard man" meant to Kay and Mr. Destronelli to D. J.:

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[93]*Loc. cit.*
[94]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
[95]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 195.
[96]Rosenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 755.

> All mothers tell their kids about him: he lives in hollows of tree, he comes down the chimneys late at night, he lurks in graveyards and you can hear his step in the attic. The sonofabitch, he is a thief and a threat: he will take everything you have and end by leaving you nothing, not even a dream.[97]

This speech is important, because it presages the fate of Sylvia.

When Sylvia is next seen, she has broken her contact with society, quit her job, and devoted all of her time to selling dreams to Mr. Revercomb. In the same way in which Kay was repelled and attracted by the mute in "A Tree of Night," Sylvia is drawn into telling her dreams to Mr. Revercomb, even though she experiences agony in doing so. Having withdrawn from the social world, her only identity is with her dreams.[98] But Mr. Revercomb has become a part of Sylvia, too, and she is unable to reject the demands he makes on her. She sinks deeper and deeper into despair and withdrawal; she alienates her old friend and roommate and associates only with Oreilly. When he is arrested, her world falls wholly apart and she lives in a neurotic stupor until Oreilly comes to rescue her. He suggests that she try to recover her dreams from Mr. Revercomb; but when she talks to Revercomb, he tells her that he cannot resell them, because he has exhausted them. It seems indeed true that, as Oreilly tells Sylvia, Mr. Revercomb has no soul, and so borrows parts of other people's. Master Misery, like all the other "wizard men," is an extension of the souls of his victims.[99] The elements of destruction are within the person, and Master Misery gives them a chance to find expression by taking away all illusion and leaving his "patients" with only the facts of reality. Sylvia has trapped herself; in her rebellion against society she allowed that part of herself to be stolen which was her only defense against society. She has escaped from the outer life only to lose the inner, and it was the inner that made her life worthwhile.[100] Without her dreams, Sylvia is spiritually poverty stricken.

As the story ends, Sylvia is walking again through Central Park, even Oreilly having deserted her, when two boys (possibly the same ones who chased her at the first of the story and surely not symbolically different from them) begin to follow her. This time, there is no panic, because ". . . there was nothing left to steal."[101] By giving herself up to potential violation, Sylvia presents symbolic evidence of her death. The destructive element, represented, at first, by Mr. Revercomb, has now taken control over Sylvia's mind. Her final revelation is that she is nothing, neither wife nor worker nor (now, most important of all) dreamer. Sylvia has symbolically vanished with her dreams, and even ravishment cannot touch her now. Her ultimate revelation is of nothing, nothing, nothing—nothing at all.

All of the preceding stories can be readily understood in terms of the quest for self-knowledge, the theme which has been shown basic to

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[97]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, pp. 108-109.
[98]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 236.
[99]*Ibid.*, p. 237.
[100]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
[101]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p. 118.

the nature of the romance. Although the quests are not always motivated by what seems to be a real desire for understanding, the recurrent pattern of attraction-repulsion shows that they are psychologically motivated by the demand of the ego for self-knowledge. There is irony, of course, in the fact that, while the quests in all of these stories are successful, the ultimate result of the knowledge is symbolic death. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* Capote's most complete working out of the quest for love and identity, this pattern is not completed in precisely the same way. Joel Knox finds a revelation enabling him to survive, although this survival demands his withdrawal from conventional society and normal reality and places him in the "other room." In terms of conventional morality, Joel may go at last to "a fate worse than death," but in terms of the survival of an identity, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is the most hopeful of Capote's nocturnal works.

One means of achieving an understanding of the revelation which climaxes this book is to examine the symbolic importance of some of the major events of the narrative, noting the manner in which all build toward the final illumination and *denouement.* The first part of the book emphasizes the progressive alienation of the protagonist, Joel Knox, from normal society and human interaction. When first seen, he is making his way toward Scully's Landing, the location of most of the events. To reach the Landing, he starts from New Orleans, a large city and a place in which he has relatives and friends. He goes from there to Biloxi, a smaller city, and then to Paradise Chapel, smaller still. He is in Paradise Chapel when the story opens, and is soon transported to Noon City, a town smaller than Paradise Chapel. From there, he travels to the Landing, home of five people. An inverse ratio is in operation, here: the nearer Joel comes to the place of his revelation, the fewer people he will be in contact with. Finally, at the moment of illumination, only his two spiritual fathers, his symbolic alter egos, are near.

Joel is searching for his father, but something is wrong with the search, for his name is Knox and his father's name, Sansom. That Mr. Sansom may not be Joel's real father is at once suggested. He enters the Landing in the grip of dreams, and when he awakes, he discovers that the planes of reality have shifted: he finds himself watching a strange woman pursue a bluejay across his bedroom and kill it with a stove poker. The bluejay is symbolically important: here it is a metaphor for Joel's capture by the forces of the Landing; when the jay reappears later, stuffed by his cousin Randolph, it symbolizes Joel's inability to escape.[102]

The woman with the poker is Joel's stepmother, Miss Amy. He has already met Jesus Fever, the ancient Negro servant, and Miss Amy introduces him to Missouri, or Zoo, as she prefers to be called, Jesus' granddaughter. She also mentions Randolph, about whom Joel has not previously heard, but she says nothing about his father. The split between father and son has deepened, although Joel still clings to the

[102] Aldridge, *op. cit.,* p. 205.

illusion that his father is a majestic man who will set him free from all his difficulties. Left to himself, Joel explores the house and grounds of the Landing, a decaying mansion overgrown with foliage. His surroundings are now typical of what Frye would call the sixth phase of romantic comedy, where society collapses, and the focus is on ". . . the secret and sheltered places . . . ," and there is ". . . the love of the occult and the marvelous, the sense of individual detachment from routine existence." This is the final phase of comedy, and the nearest to tragedy.[103] As he speculates about the mystery of his father, he looks up at the top windows of the house and sees an unexpected figure:

> It was at this point that he saw the queer lady. She was holding aside the curtains of the left corner window, and smiling and nodding at him, as if in greeting or approval; but she was no one Joel had ever known: the hazy substance of her face, the suffused marshmallow features, *brought to mind his own vaporish reflection in the wavy chamber mirror.*[104]

When the figure disappears and the spell over Joel passes, he steps backward, stumbling against the bell which dominates the garden: ". . . one raucous, cracked note rang out, shattering the hot stillness."[105] The note from the bell is like the sound of doom, and it announces Joel's meeting with another manifestation of the "wizard man." Since he has seen the figure during the time in which he was wondering about his father, the symbolic implication of the substitution of the figure for his father is also present. Finally, the italicized portion of the quoted material emphasizes the same relationship which has already been discussed in the short stories: *i.e.*, the "wizard man" is the dark twin of the character he will haunt and force toward self-revelation.

Joel has little time for reflection on the meaning of the lady in the window. He is given a series of shocks which emphasize the twisted nature of relationships at the Landing and his inability to elude their influence. Joel receives the first shock when Zoo, at the height of a religious frenzy, rips off the ribbon she has worn around her neck and reveals a terrible scar. Although Joel does not know the significance of the scar, he realizes, nevertheless, that it is a revelation of what happens to people at the Landing. He tries to run from it but falls into a briar patch and must be rescued by Zoo. His attempted flight and its failure may be seen as symbolic of his wish to flee the Landing and his inability to do so.[106]

The second shock comes at dinner that night, when the reader is introduced to Randolph for the first time. It is immediately apparent that he is an ideal figure to represent the "wizard man." He is physically repulsive, but his wit and cultivation make him attractive. His eyes, like those of the mute, are his best feature, wide-set and ". . . like sky-blue marbles."[107] It is also obvious to the reader (though not to Joel)

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[103]Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
[104]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 67. The italics are the present author's.
[105]*Loc. cit.*
[106]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-207.
[107]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 79.

that Randolph is the lady in the window. When Joel questions Randolph about the lady, Amy starts to blurt out something, and the results are explosive:

> Randolph kicked her under the table; he accomplished this maneuver so skillfully it would have escaped Joel altogether had Amy's response been less extreme: she jerked back as though lightning had rocked the chair, and, shielding her eyes with the gloved hand, let out a pitiful wail: "Snake a snake I thought it was a snake bit me crawled under the table bit me foot you fool never forgive bit me my heart a snake," repeated over and over the words began to rhyme, to hum from wall to wall where giant moth shadows jittered.
>
> Joel went all hollow inside; he thought he was going to wee wee right there in his breeches, and he wanted to hop up and run, just as he had at Jesus Fever's. Only he couldn't, *not this time.*[108]

The paralysis of the Landing has already taken deeper root; at the prayer meeting, Joel tried to run and failed. Now, he cannot even try.[109] More than before, the weird events are compelling him to remain to find out the truth. He tries to retreat into what he thinks is his "other room," a fantasy world into which he escapes when things press in on him too much. But, now, he cannot sustain fantasy, and the voices of the people around him begin to disturb him. Slowly, the fantasy world of the Landing is beginning to dominate him and overpower his other fantasies.

The third shock comes when Joel tries to mail letters to his aunt and a friend in New Orleans. He writes lies to the friend, but confesses to his aunt that the Landing is horrible and that he wants to come home. As he is putting the letters in the mailbox, he meets Zoo and Little Sunshine, the ancient Negro hermit who inhabits the Cloud Hotel, a long-deserted resort surrounded by legends and fearful tales. For Zoo, Little Sunshine has made a charm to keep away evil; and when Joel asks him to make one for him, it is the beginning of a father-son relationship paralleling the one he has begun to establish with Randolph.[110] Little Sunshine has stayed at the Cloud Hotel long after the guests have departed for much the same reason that Joel will finally stay at the Landing: when he tried once to leave, ". . . other voices, other rooms, voices lost and clouded, strummed his dreams."[111] Everywhere there is the compulsion to remain at the symbolic heart of darkness. The shock comes when Joel returns to the Landing from visiting the Tompkins twins, Idabel and Florabel, with whom he has established a slight relationship, however fleeting and unsatisfactory. He finds that the letters are gone from the mailbox, but that the mailman has not taken them, for the money he left for postage is lying in the dust by the mailbox. As he stoops to pick up the money, he hears gunfire ring out from the house. Although it is only Zoo firing at chicken hawks, the fusion of the two

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 82. The italics are the present author's.

[109] Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

[110] Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 241.

[111] Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 100.

concepts makes it clear that Joel is captured by the Landing and that attempts to escape will not be tolerated.[112]

The intent of the narrative now changes from Joel's struggle to escape to his efforts to retain his individuality and self-image while still in bondage. That attempt is severely inhibited by his discovery of his father. Instead of the strong figure whom Joel had expected, his father is helplessly paralyzed, able only to utter a few words, and wholly dependent upon those around him; he drops red tennis balls with his one partially functioning arm to call for attention. Because much of Joel's self-image has been based on the prospect of a strong father with whom to counteract the madness of the Landing, that self-image is damaged, and his efforts to maintain it weakened.[113]

Since much of his struggle to retain his ego is based on an attempt to assert his coming masculinity, Joel's relationship with Idabel Tompkins proves damaging.[114] Much of Joel's failure to hold onto his identity as a person in the second section of the book is the result of his failure to dominate Idabel.[115] Because the Landing, and particularly his newly-discovered father, are so antithetical to Joel's ideas of what life should be, he retreats from them with Idabel. She, however, is a determined tomboy whose dream of the ideal life would be masculine; joining the Navy is the upper extent of her aspirations. When Joel tries to express himself sexually, she fights him, and both lose part of their illusions in the struggle: her sunglasses, which she wears to make the world more palatable, are broken, and the glass cuts Joel. Neither wins a clear victory; but both are losers.

Three more events symbolize Joel's progressive loss of masculinity and his shift toward a homosexual relationship with Randolph. First, Zoo's father dies, and she sets off for Washington, D.C., to fulfill two of her life's treasured dreams: to find a husband who will love her, and to see snow. Her departure is damaging enough to Joel's development as a man, for she was the only female at the Landing who had acted at all as a female, or treated him as a man. (". . . you is nothing but a kitty now, but comes the time you is full growed. . . what a Tom you gonna be," she had said.[116]) It is her return a few days later that is most damaging, for she has been brutally raped and tortured by three white men. Sexuality between male and female is seen as ugly and bestial. The second shock comes when he and Idabel set out for the Cloud Hotel. A water moccasin blocks their path, and although Joel is carrying his grandfather's Civil War sword, he is paralyzed by the vision of his father's eyes that he sees in the snake's eyes, and Idabel has to take the sword from him and kill the snake. Joel fails not only to assume the masculine role of protector, but has also failed the hereditary obligations placed on him by the sword of his heroic grandfather.[117] Moreover, since

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[112]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
[113]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 241.
[114]*Ibid.*, p. 242.
[115]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
[116]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 117.
[117]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

it was his fear at finding the eyes of his father seemingly rebuking him for running away, Joel's failure may symbolize his anguish at finding an impotent father.[118]

The final and most important damage is done to Joel's manhood on the night of his final attempt to escape from the Landing. As he and Idabel slip through the forest to run away from home, they stumble into a glade where two Negroes are making love. Idabel is revolted and crashes noisily away, but Joel thinks it wrong to frighten the lovers. He has found momentary exultation in the lovers' coupling, in his knowledge that love is ". . . two people with each other in withness. . . ."[119] Joel sees clearly that love is the answer to the loneliness he has felt, and longs to give and receive love. Idabel will have no part of love, however, because she will surrender no part of her dominance.[120] Joel's last opportunity for normal sexuality is foiled by his own weakness and Idabel's refusal to give up the power she has attained by denying the female role.

The extent of Joel's sexual crippling and Randolph's growing influence over him are shown at the carnival to which Joel and Idabel go. There they meet Miss Wisteria, a beautiful midget. Both Joel and Idabel are fascinated by the midget, displaying the common attraction of Capote's characters for the maimed or grotesque. Miss Wisteria tries to seduce Joel at the top of the ferris wheel, and Joel is ready to surrender to what she offers when he sees Randolph standing below, watching him. When the ferris wheels turns to the bottom, Joel runs away in terror. Now he is attempting to flee from both heterosexuality and Randolph, whom he sees as an agent of his father come to punish him for running away from the Landing and his duties as a son. In thus identifying Randolph with Mr. Sansom, Joel has equated the two in his mind, and because it is Randolph who has come for him, Randolph has won the struggle for Joel's love.[121] Following this episode Joel is returned to the Landing asleep, as he was when he first arrived, and awakes to find the Landing has now become reality and the outside world illusion.[122]

The appearance of Randolph at the carnival brings him back into focus as the "wizard man," who will guide Joel into his new identity. Randolph's explanation of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Sansom's paralysis and his own connection with him in the second section of the book has already cast him in the role of Joel's teacher. Now, with Joel's rejection of both his father and male-female sexuality, Randolph is ready to assume the dual role of father and lover. Just as the first section of the book was concerned with Joel's attempt to escape the Landing, and the second with his attempt to find accommodation within its limits, so the third section focuses on the inter-relationship of Joel and Randolph,

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[118]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 242.
[119]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 188.
[120]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
[121]*Ibid.*, p. 212.
[122]*Ibid.*, p. 213.

and the education of Joel to fulfill the new role for which Randolph has been grooming him since he first arrived at the Landing.

Evidence of Randolph's success in altering Joel to fit his new role is given when Joel allows him to burn the postcard he has received from Idabel. In ignoring her entreaty that he write, Joel has severed his last contact with life outside the Landing. With this link broken, with Zoo's return, and with all coherence literally gone from Joel's world, Randolph can take him on the symbolic pilgrimmage to the shrine of perverted love, the Cloud Hotel. There, with Randolph and Little Sunshine, his two unholy spiritual fathers, to guide him, Joel finds his "other room."[123] At last he has journeyed into the heart of his own dark consciousness by journeying into the heart of literal darkness in the Cloud Hotel.[124] First, he was a prisoner; then, his identity was destroyed; and now, he is reborn, through Randolph's efforts, as a new person, a love to satisfy the loneliness of Randolph's useless life.

So completely has Joel's old self been destroyed that he feels neither regret nor fear when the revelation is made. Instead, on the following morning, he is elated with his new being:

> "I am me," Joel whooped. "I am Joel, we are the same people." And he looked for a tree to limb: he would go right to the very top, and there, midway to heaven, he would spread his arms and claim the world.[125]

He is so strong that he can look down on Randolph, and help him when he stumbles and falls. Revelation has freed Joel, not doomed him, and his life, though committed to abnormality, is better to him than an uncommitted life.

When Joel and Randolph return to the Landing, they find Zoo and Miss Amy trying to uproot the bell in the garden. Miss Amy wants to sell it as an antique to escape the Landing, and to Zoo, the bell, which was used by the old masters of the Landing to summon their slaves, symbolizes her captivity. She overturns it with a crash, a suggestion that she still wishes to escape, even though she has lost the power to do so.[126] But Randolph pays no attention to either woman, and walks blindly into the house. Momentary visions of escape occur to Joel when he learns that his aunt has been there looking for him; but when the lady appears in the window, no longer mysterious to Joel, he reaffirms his commitment. He pauses for only a second, to look back ". . . at the boy he had left behind."[127] Then, without fear or hestitation, he goes toward the house and his new life.

Thus, in Capote's most complex working out of the theme of the discovery of self, there is hope for survival through commitment. Unlike the revelations of Mrs. Miller, Walter Ranney, Kay, Vincent, and Sylvia, Joel's discovery enables him to survive. In Joel's world, which is indeed

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[123]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 243.
[124]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
[125]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 227.
[126]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, pp. 243-244.
[127]Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 231.

a private one, morality is not a consideration; existence of the self, in whatever form possible, is the best that can be achieved. But private as this world may be, it is not disconnected from human life. The search for an identity which can survive in a given environment is as old as literature, and indeed as old as mankind.

IV

The Widening Circle

The transition from the dark side of Truman Capote's fiction to the light seems abrupt and startling, but an understanding of certain connecting links will show that, while there is indeed a vast difference between the Capote of "A Tree of Night" and the one of "A Christmas Memory," the dichotomy is not as startling as those two stories would indicate at first reading. Familiar figures reappear in new disguises, and the recurrent quest for identity and self-knowledge, so prominent in the nocturnal world, is often found in the world of daylight. There is a vast difference of tone and mood between the two worlds, and a difference of intent which can best be understood after an examination of the works which make up the sunlit and often humorous side of Capote's work. As a point of departure, it may be safely stated that the stories to be discussed hereafter take place in a public world, in contrast to the world of private terror created in those stories previously discussed. In contrast to the lonely struggle of the mind with itself, these stories concern themselves with a struggle in an often hostile social world.

Because *The Grass Harp* defines so precisely the daylight form of Capote's work, and because it contrasts so sharply, at least in mood and tone, with *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* it will be well to consider it first. Like *Other Voices, Other Rooms, The Grass Harp* must be considered a romance, not only because it involves a quest for identity, but also because of its tone of ". . . nostalgic awareness of past innocence and lost love."[128] According to Frye, one of the recurrent qualities of the romance is its nostalgia, its symbolic looking back to a golden age.[129] For the narrator-protagonist of *The Grass Harp,* Collin Fenwick, the remembered period was both an idyll and an awakening to some of the harsher realities of the social world.[130] It is the double revelation of the wonder of love and the brutality of the world which at once differentiates this book from *Other Voices, Other Rooms.* Joel Knox finds only himself; Collin Fenwick finds himself and the world around him.

The heroine of the book is Dolly Talbo and, despite her wispy, detached personality, "heroine" is not too strong a term to use in describing her. She is the catalyst of the story, an innocent who ultimately brings herself and others to revelations, and, as such, becomes a kind of "wizard man" in reverse. Instead of forcing people to reveal things to themselves which can only destroy them, Dolly enables people to understand things which enable them to live for the first time. Dolly begins the action of the book by refusing to allow her coldly practical sister, Verena, to commercialize the dropsy cure which she makes from

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[128]Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 246.

[129]Frye, *op. cit.,* p. 186.

[130]Schorer, McCullers and Capote; Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present,* pp. 102-103.

a recipe taught her by a band of gypsies. The cure has enabled Dolly to communicate with the outside world, and she refuses to surrender the personal relationship which she has had with her customers. When Verena tells Dolly that she is useless, Dolly feels morally obligated to leave the house. With her go Catherine Creek, a Negro servant who claims to be an Indian, and Collin, sixteen-year-old nephew of Verena and Dolly. They take refuge in a treehouse in a chinaberry tree, close to the Baptist cemetery where the harp of Indian grass sings.

The treehouse is a world in which dreams and reality are the same, and it soon becomes a haven for those who find the world of society unpalatable.[131] The original trio is joined by elderly Judge Charlie Cool, who no longer fits into his sons' lives and prefers not to adapt; and Riley Henderson, an orphan whose wealth and independent spirit have set him apart from the rest of the community. Society, although it disapproves of all the people in the treehouse, cannot let them rebel; and so forces of law and religion, if not of justice and brotherhood, are marshalled against them. Inspired by Verena, whose wealth has made her a powerful influence in the town, these forces come to the treehouse to bring the violaters of community standards back into what public opinion calls sanity.[132]

The five have other ideas, however, and, despite superior numbers, the forces of society cannot rout them. Solidly unified by Dolly's gentle persistence, they have a force which the rational, with their differing motives, cannot match.[133] Even after Catherine is dragged away to jail and Riley is shot, it is Verena's collapse which prompts the remaining fugitives to return to society. When Dr. Morris Ritz absconds with the funds Verena had intended to use for her project, she is forced to admit the emptiness of the world she had created for herself:

> . . . it's too long to be alone, a lifetime. I walk through the house, nothing is mine: your pink room, your kitchen, the house is yours, and Catherine's too, I think. Only don't leave me, let me live with you. I'm feeling old, I want my sister.[134]

Dolly, too, wants her sister, and so the idyll ends, but not without changes in all who took part in it.

For Dolly, the treehouse episode marks the end of innocence. She has experienced pain and seen her friends hurt, and she can never be the same again; when she dies, it seems to be the only thing she could have done while remaining true to her beliefs. Judge Cool finally comes to understand not only his isolation from his sons, but also that isolation is natural and even valuable to him, and, free from worries about what his sons think of him, moves into a boarding house. Riley Henderson uses the lessons he has learned to focus his abundant energies on the world of society and soon becomes a respected town leader. Catherine, for whom the idyll was less a revelation than a confirmation of her

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[131]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
[132]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 247.
[133]*Loc. cit.*
[134]Capote, *The Grass Harp and A Tree of Night*, p 84.

belief in evil, and who is greatly saddened by the loss of her only real friend, has, as she says, ". . . put down the load . . ." with no intention of picking it up again.[135] For Collin, as well, the end of innocence has come but without sadness, because he has learned what Dolly knew all the while: the power and permanence of love. Love is for him the element of the redemption of identity.[136]

Hassan interprets *The Grass Harp* as a parable of the artist, who can, because his imagination is free, enable others to free themselves.[137] Schorer finds the important revelation of the book to be Collin's discovery that the private world is better than the public one, because it is within the private world that a person gains the strength to face the public world, and either to overcome it or to be indifferent to its persecutions.[138] This perspective helps one to see *The Grass Harp* in relation to *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and to make an important distinction between them. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* Randolph, acting as a "wizard man," ends Joel's innocence and leads him to a revelation that readies him to live a life of isolation at the Landing. Dolly, the gentle "wizard" of *The Grass Harp,* helps to prepare Collin to face the outside world. Joel is ready to hear only the whispered voice of the private other room, while Collin hears the music of the grass harp, its melodies telling the stories of all people of all ages.

This understanding leads directly to another which becomes of great importance to the broad range of Capote's fiction. Levine views the grass harp as the important symbol of the book, because in telling the stories of all people, it becomes ". . . a symbol of the immutable moral order, an order of the good and the imaginative which always tells a story of the lives of the people . . . who have lived and died there."[139] While he does not pursue the idea at length, it is an important one, for it suggests the *enduring* nature of these revelations. Unlike the revelations of the characters in the nocturnal stories, the enlightenments reached by Collin and others may have a chance to endure, to affect the future.[140] Both the grass harp itself and the reminiscent nature of the narration contribute to the knowledge that these are permanent things which will be retold and passed from generation to generation. The idea of revelations which touch more than one person is vital to the sunlit side of Capote's fiction and will become more important and far reaching in later works.

"A Christmas Memory" is one of the earliest of Capote's stories, and deals with the same theme that is basic to *The Grass Harp*: the revelation of the beauty of life to a child through the agency of an elderly and seemingly deranged woman. The narrator stands in the same relationship to the story that Collin does to *The Grass Harp,* and there is the pervasive feeling of a remembered idyll. The main character in this

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[135]*Ibid.*, p. 95.
[136]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
[137]Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 248.
[138]Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in *The Creative Present,* p. 105.
[139]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
[140]Hassan, *Radical Innocence,* p. 250.

story is the narrator's cousin, a figure so identical to Dolly Talbo as to be inseparable from Dolly's image. Instead of Dolly's dropsy cure, her means of communication with the outside world is the baking of Christmas fruitcakes, which she sends to such diverse people as missionaries in China, President Roosevelt, and the local bootlegger, who supplies her with the whiskey to spice the cakes. The narrator remembers one Christmas, the last he spent with his cousin, which taught him the beauties of giving, the value of things which money does not buy, and folly of judging by outward appearance. These lessons prepared him to face the world of the military school where he is when he receives news of his cousin's death. The loss is like losing part of himself, for she has become an alter-ego to him, as the bringers of revelation always are in Capote's fictional scheme. Even death has been prepared for in his initiation: "As for me, I could leave the world with today in my eyes," she has hold him.[141] So the narrator watches the skies when he learns of her death, as if expecting to see both of their souls going toward heaven. The story is one of the most stylistically perfect that Capote has written, and its poetry conveys exactly the elegaic theme. It is a remembrance of things past which expresses the idea of revelations of things of lasting importance, of wisdom undiminished by death.

"My Side of the Matter," another early story which is only partially satisfactory, introduces a new theme which will become significant in its more thorough expansions. Its style closely resembles that of Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O."[142] The theme which renders it important to the present discussion concerns the disruptive effect which a single character may have on the society in which he is placed. In this story the "wizard man" assumes a new identity: the cheerful disturber of the peace of the bourgeois world. In spite of odds he has calculated at 346 to 1, the narrator-protagonist triumphs, and the image of him in command of the enemy stronghold might serve as an archetypal figure for Capote's most memorable characters in the light mood, the utterly independent, often amoral rogues who swoop down on society to take advantage of it. "My Side of the Matter" ends with the hero's symbolic withdrawal from the society of his wife and his aunts, and leaves the feeling that permanent alteration of that society is imminent. No social order is ever quite the same after a Capote hero (or heroine) has finished with it, and almost without exception the hero moves on after altering the social structure.

The next manifestation of the youth with the power to conquer adult society is Appleseed, the hero of the story "Jug of Silver." The name Appleseed at once suggests the old American myth of Johnny Appleseed, and the mysterious comings and goings of the boy emphasize his relationship with the bringer of life in the folk legend. Although his methods are more gentle than those of the narrator of "My Side of the Matter," his victory over normalcy is as complete. The stage is set for this whimsical

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[141]Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 127.

[142]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 155; Rosenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 755; Louise Y. Gossett, *Violence in Recent Southern Fiction*, p. 157.

story when the narrator's drugstore owner uncle, Mr. Marshall, is induced by his mysterious friend, Hamurabi, to fill an empty wine jug with dimes and nickels and give customers in his store a chance to guess how much money the jug contains. The jar, intended to counteract the loss of business caused by a new drugstore across the street, will be given to the person whose guess is most nearly correct. As a promotional stunt, the jar works perfectly, and business is soon better than ever. Then, a disturbing element enters the picture in the form of Appleseed and his bucktoothed sister, Middy, who is convinced that she is marked for movie stardom if only she can get new teeth. Appleseed announces that he will count the coins and win the money, confident of his ability to do so because, as he explains, "A lady in Louisiana told me I could see things other folks couldn't see 'cause I was born with a caul on my head."[143] His desperate intensity soon has Mr. Marshall and Hamarubi wishing they had never thought of the idea of the jug; it would be too heart-breaking to see the boy lose. Their worries about the boy's anguish turn to awe when Appleseed's guess is not just the closest to the correct figure, but the exact amount. Wish and fulfillment suddenly become one, as Appleseed uses the money to buy Middy her false teeth, and eventually the two vanish from the town as unaccountably as they came.[144]

The legend remains behind them, however, and Appleseed in particular becomes almost a myth. Hamurabi goes each Christmas to the Baptist Bible class to tell the story and thus perpetuate the myth. He is also trying to achieve wider belief in the myth by writing it in the form of a short story and mailing it to magazines. It is always rejected, however, because the editors do not believe Appleseed nor the evidence of his miracle. In exact opposition to the "wizard man" who was used to frighten Kay into good behavior in "A Tree of Night," Appleseed is a "wizard" whose story is related to successive generations as a model of the power of faith. He has changed the entire consciousness of a town, but without diminishing himself or being corrupted by the world he has influenced.[145]

A child with powers even more remarkable than Appleseed's is Miss Bobbit of "Children on Their Birthdays." Miss Bobbit, perhaps more than any other Capote character, *accomplishes* things: she forces two potentially typical Southern bullies not only to respect a Negro, but to work for one; she methodically punishes two dogs which disturb her with their howling; when the town drunk goes mad with the idea that Miss Bobbit and Rosalba are stealing all the town's toilet paper, she ties him up so efficiently that it is a month before he can walk again; and she defies both local morality and legality by refusing to go to church or to school. Nothing stays the same when Miss Bobbit is near by.

When Manny Fox appears in town offering a Hollywood screen test to the winner of the talent contest he organizes, Miss Bobbit decides

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
[144] Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 238.
[145] *Loc. cit.*

that she will win, even if it means calling in the Devil to help her. On the night of the talent show, Miss Bobbit demonstrates either Satanic assistance or her own shrewdness, and the latter seems the more likely. Although the song and dance act which she performs is blatantly ribald, she has so much charm that even the religious people of the town do not doubt her right to the screen test. Manny Fox soon leaves, having pocketed not only the profit from the admissions he had sold to the talent show, but also the one hundred and fifty dollars he had collected from each of a dozen or more local boys in return for his promise that he will arrange high paying jobs for them on the fruit ships sailing from New Orleans.

At this point, it seems that Miss Bobbit's penchant for making things happen has failed, for Manny Fox has no intention of arranging either her screen test or the jobs for the boys. The town becomes wholly demoralized by the thought of lost opportunity and money, until Miss Bobbit goes to work again. Through a combination of shrewd thinking, quick action, and the seeming suspension of all known laws of human existence, she manages not only to have Manny Fox arrested, but also arranges for the return of the boys' money. By accomplishing this apparent miracle, Miss Bobbit also earns her screen test. She proposes that the boys, whose money she has regained, pool the money and use it to send her to Hollywood. She promises to give them ten percent of all her earnings, which will, she calculates, makes all of them rich. Not one of the boys wanted to do it: but when Miss Bobbit looked at them what was there to say? Just as the characters of Capote's nocturnal stories are unable to resist the temptation of the "wizard man," so the townspeople, here, are unable to resist the call of his "wizard child."[146]

In spite of her hard work, however, Miss Bobbit does not get her chance at stardom. On the day of her departure for Hollywood, she is run over by the six o'clock bus from Mobile. Miss Bobbit's death is ambiguous: the reader is never sure whether it is a punishment for displaying emotion, as she is running to meet two boys who are carrying armloads of roses to her when she is struck by the bus, or simply a capricious act of fate. In thematic terms, however, the causes for Miss Bobbit's death are unimportant. She is not a character, but a catalyst for the people of the town, and her importance is not as a person, but as a town legend. She has enlivened the sleepy town, and her memory will continue to do so. Miss Bobbit has been compared with Miriam, and the comparison is just.[147] Both appear mysteriously to make changes in the lives of those with whom they associate. That Miriam stays with Mrs. Miller demonstrates the woman's doomed future, but Miss Bobbit can disappear, and her legend will be sufficient to maintain the changes she has made in the town. So mysterious, indeed, is the sudden death of Miss Bobbit, that the reader may have the feeling that she will magically reappear in another sleepy town to do her good works. Because of the mystery that surrounds her, Miss Bobbit becomes almost a whimsical

[146]*Ibid.*, p. 239.
[147]Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

religious figure, and the reminiscent, slightly elegaic tone of the story becomes a kind of gospel of the healing and enlightening powers of Miss Bobbit, the midget miracle worker.

The high point of Capote's sunlit fiction is the short novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a work which also represents the joining together of the numerous themes which have been shown to dominate the cheerful aspect of his writing. Its heroine, Miss Holiday Golightly, represents the joining of the child with mysterious powers to influence society with the charming prostitute who is really seeking true love. Holly has often been compared with Christopher Isherwood's Sally Bowles, and often these comparisons are unflattering.[148] Walter Allen, in particular, has elevated Sally at Holly's expense, and praised *Goodbye to Berlin* by condemning *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. His comments make a useful starting point for a discussion because they point to critical misjudgments, perhaps induced by the private "other room" atmosphere of his earlier works, which led to the idea that social interactions have no place in Capote's fiction. Allen states:

> . . . the significance of Sally Bowles in Isherwood's story lies in the context in which she had being—Berlin at the beginning of the Nazis' rise to power; she is symptomatic; and the power of her story comes from the tension Isherwood establishes between her and her background. There is nothing comparable to this in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.[149]

But there *is* tension between Holly and her society, and it is precisely this tension which makes Holly the consummate example of the good "wizard" in Capote's work. If she is not "symptomatic" of her society, it is because she is busy being antithetical to the evil elements of that society, and performing her "wizardly" function of altering her surroundings and herself—without losing the essential part of that self.

The society with which Holly must deal, unlike the tranquil ones Miss Bobbit and Appleseed invade, is in flux, as symbolized by the date, 1943, and the place, New York City.[150] Despite this flux, certain stable elements are present, and many of these elements are evil: hypocrisy is present everywhere, and artifice is essential for survival. Holly utterly refuses to play the role of hypocrite, or to like anything that she does not find appealing. Her body is available for a price, but not her spirit. "I'll never get used to anything," she tells the narrator. "Anybody that does, they might as well be dead."[151] Although she lies with something close to genius when confronted with bothersome legality or morality, she makes no excuses for her profession. Nowhere in the book is there any suggestion of an apology for her status, or the suggestion that she ought to be morally better than she is. Although she does not plan to be a prostitute forever, she does not lie to herself or others about the fact that she is one for the present. She is equally stubborn about asking for pity

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[148]Alfred Kazin *Contemporaries*, p. 250: Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-303; Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 255.

[149]Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

[150]Kazin, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

[151]Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 20.

because of the hard life she has led as an orphan and child bride. If anyone attempts to find out about her past, she only rubs her nose in a characteristic gesture to let her questioner know that he is trespassing.

Holly must keep up the fences around her privacy, because privacy allows her to retain her improbability, and it is this improbability that allows her to criticize her environment.[152] Despite the amoral elements which are present in her personality, she has strong basic beliefs which give a sharp contrast to the moral vagueness of some of her associates and, remarkably enough, show signs of impressing and affecting them. Even such a hardened cynic as O. J. Berman, Holly's former agent, has a kind of gruff respect for Holly. He asks the narrator if he thinks Holly is a "phony," and the narrator replies that he would not have thought so. Berman replies with an answer that makes a useful distinction about Holly's character: "That's where you're wrong. She is a phony. But on the other hand you're right. She isn't because she's a *real* phony. She believes all this crap she believes."[153]

Whatever her beliefs, Holly is very much attached to the world, or at least to parts of it, and to herself.[154] She has every intention of being rich, but, unlike most of her fellow characters, she does not want to part with her self to obtain wealth:

> I don't mean I'd mind being rich and famous. That's very much on my schedule, and someday I'll try to get around to it; but if it happens, I'd like to have my ego tagging along. I want to still be me when I wake up one fine morning and have breakfast at Tiffany's.[155]

Holly frequently demonstrates her determination to retain her ego in its present form, and ultimately she flees the country to avoid having to testify against a friend.

In her final flight, Holly is, as Hassan has remarked, like Huck Finn, "lighting out for the territory ahead."[156] Her flight, however, has some of the pragmatic aspects of Miss Bobbit's good deeds. As she explains to the narrator:

> Certain shades of limelight wreck a girls complexion. Even if a jury gave me the Purple Heart, this neighborhood holds no future: they'd still have up every rope from LaRue to Perona's Bar and Grill. If you lived off my particular talents, Cookie, you'd understand the kind of bankruptcy I'm describing.[157]

One senses that Holly's love of freedom, more than mere matters of money, is what is at stake here. The bankruptcy she speaks of is the loss of youth, and this spiritual bankruptcy of not being able to go and to do as she pleases would inhibit her more than any lack of money. Still, it is not without an eye to the future cost of survival that she tells the narrator to find a list of the fifty richest men in Brazil before she leaves for that country.

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[152]Hassan, "Birth of a Heroine," *Prairie Schooner*, XXXIV (Spring, 1960), 79.
[153]Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 28.
[154]Hassan, "Birth of a Heroine," *Prairie Schooner*, XXXIV (Spring, 1960), 80.
[155]Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 35.
[156]Hassan, "Birth of a Heroine," *Prairie Schooner*, XXXIV (Spring, 1960), 83.
[157]Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 80.

In her flight, Holly represents the ultimate fictional extension of the individual's ability to interrupt the orderly processes of society. The other heroes and heroines of Capote's fiction affect more limited numbers of people in their search for identity. Holly momentarily frustrates the efforts of the United States government to prosecute racketeer Sally Tomato; her notoriety threatens international politics because of her involvement with a Brazilian diplomat; and she terrifies the socially elite by threatening them with connection with the scandal. At the same time she is affecting, on a smaller but not less important scale, the lives of individuals, particularly the narrator and Joe Bell, the bartender who loves Holly from a distance. Nothing she has touched will ever be the same again, and in the case of the narrator and Joe Bell, at least, life is richer and better for having known her.

In the last analysis, Holly represents the value to society of the individual's search for identity. She leaves the book with her full identity undefined, and her search for meanings still in progress. But part of her search has infuenced others' lives, and as they tell about her, she becomes a legend, at least to Joe Bell and the narrator. It is Joe's phone call to the narrator about the latest news of Holly that sets the book in motion, and the book itself is a part of the legend of Holly. Hassan suggests that the book takes the form of an invocation: ". . . hail, Holly, and farewell."[158] It is the narrator's blessing for Holly's good work and the expression of the hope that it will continue, and, in its way, the expression of Capote's faith in the power of the "wizard" to heal and to teach.

The grass harp is the symbol of the light side of Capote, and Holly the best expression of what the grass harp tells. All of the stories in this aspect of Capote's fiction are about people who, in searching for themselves, influence others, and all of their stories are told in a manner like that of the harp of Indian grass. The characters become legends, passed from generation to generation, and thus their legends endure. Although Joel Knox's resolution enables him to survive, it is applicable only to him. No grass harp will tell it to the next generation. Characters like Appleseed, Miss Bobbit, and Holly, however, have an influence for good which others may understand and use. Capote's lighter stories often assume a tone of simplicity and humor which may obscure their more serious intent and meaning. If Capote's nocturnal stories are given over to the hopelessness and despair of grotesque and lonely people, his daylight stories are of useful people, giving life and hope to others in their search for themselves.

[158]Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 254.

V

When Worlds Collide

In 1951, John W. Aldridge wrote of Truman Capote:

> Now that his legend exists, Capote is committed to keeping it alive; his professional standing depends on it. And since the legend grew out of a special subject matter, this means that he must continue writing in his old vein even if he tires of it, exhausts it, or matures beyond . . . . When this happens, all that he writes must begin to sound like Capote trying with all his might but no longer with all his heart to write like Capote.[159]

Literary prognostication is at best a dangerous game, but in 1951 Aldridge's gamble must have looked like a sure bet. Capote's output to that point had been a small one, restricted by a fascination with the grotesque and a tendency toward preciousness and pretentiousness of style. Even allowing for Capote's relative youth in 1951 and the disturbing tendency of writers to grow beyond the limits critics have set for them, few people would have predicted that fifteen years later a critic would write of another Capote book:

> [*In Cold Blood*] is, flatly and without question, his biggest, boldest, most serious, most difficult and best written work. . . . It is more than a demonstration of growth, power, and promise for the future. It is a frank bid for greatness.[160]

In Cold Blood was by no means unexpected; as noted in Chapter I, Mark Schorer foretold its coming more than three years before its publication. What was unexpected, perhaps, was that *In Cold Blood* should be the powerful, important book that it was.

The genesis of *In Cold Blood,* the years spent in its its creation, and its huge financial success are parts of a story already too well known to need reiteration. What is needed is an understanding of the book—an understanding of what it says and how it says it. In short, what and (perhaps more importantly) how does *In Cold Blood* mean? Capote's careful collection of facts about the grisly murder of the Herbert Clutter family and the consequences of that murder is well known. Is *In Cold Blood* then merely a super police report? The book explores the histories and psyches of the two murderers at length. It is a socio-psychological document of the same genre as John Bartlow Martin's *Why Did They Kill?* Or is it an attack on the M'Naghten Rule, the definition of criminal guilt which sent Perry Smith to the gallows despite a psychologist's opinion that he was insane by any criteria other than the M'Naghten Rule? or a defense of Smith, whose personal tragedy obviously affected Capote deeply?

According to one's own taste and beliefs, *In Cold Blood* may be read in any of these ways, and such a reading may lend importance to the

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[159]Aldridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.
[160]Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

book. No book which attempts to understand the nature of violence in a time and a place that often seem filled with Lee Harvey Oswalds, Charles Whitmans, and Richard Specks can be ignored by rational men. In a violent age, no man can ignore a work which in any way leads toward an understanding and curbing of violence. But if this is all that *In Cold Blood* amounts to, it is outside the province of the literary critic, and belongs to the psychologist, sociologist, and criminologist. If it is only a police report in literary style, a case study in psychopathology, a polemic for more reasonable laws, or a legal brief in defense of a man already dead, it is not literature.

Yet everything about *In Cold Blood* proclaims that it *is* literature, and that it must be read first of all *as* literature—a work of art fashioned out of the complexities of real life. It has form, and it has meaning, and since life has no form and death has either no meaning or all meanings, the form and meaning of the book have been imposed by an outside force, a controlling intelligence—that force and intelligence being, of course, Truman Capote, Artist. And since that force was rational, it is possible rationally to comprehend the significance of *In Cold Blood,* while it is quite impossible ever to comprehend the murder which *In Cold Blood* is "about." Murder is all things to all people; any meaning may be forced upon it or extracted from it. Not so this book, for while each reader brings to it a different set of beliefs and standards, its central core of meaning remains unchanged and unchangeable.

The first and perhaps most important keys to the meaning of *In Cold Blood* are found in the first five paragraphs of the book. With deliberate precision, Capote sets the scene of the fundamental action of his story: Holcomb, Kansas, a tiny, arid town on ". . . the high wheat plains of Western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call 'out there.' "[161] Here, the personification of the American melting pot mixes together ". . . outdoor folk of very varied stock—German, Irish, Norwegian, Mexican, Japanese."[162] These people struggle against the vagaries of the harsh climate to earn their living, and use their tax money to build ". . . a modern and ably staffed 'consolidated' school . . ." for their children.[163] Through this rugged but prosperous country runs the Santa Fe, that powerful symbol of the joining of East and West, the linking of the two halves of America into one nation. Here, in sum, is the very center of the American Dream—"MIDWAY U.S.A.," as the Kansas license plates now proudly proclaim.

Capote moves next to the individualized dream within the larger dream, the Herbert Clutter family. The head of the Clutter family, the master of River Valley Farm, is so perfect a man as to seem a symbol of everything America holds dear. A native of Kansas, a graduate of Kansas State University, Herbert Clutter is the complete picture of the self-made man. The son of poor but honest parents, Clutter has risen to prominence in his community, has made himself sufficiently but not

[161] Capote, *In Cold Blood,* p. 3.
[162] *Ibid.,* p. 4.
[163] *Loc. cit.*

ostentatiously weathly, and has even received national recognition as a member of the Federal Farm Credit Board under the Eisenhower Administration. His children are no less perfect; Nancy, a straight-A student, active in organizations, respected by her teachers, admired by the community; and Kevin, shy, earnest, hard-working, a lover of animals and machinery. Only Mrs. Clutter is out of tune with the perfection of the rest of the family. She is shy, withdrawn. At times she seems almost psychotic. But there is hope for her as the book opens, for it appears that all her anguish has been caused, not by mental illness, but by a spinal dislocation. If a cure can be effected, as seems almost certain, the Clutter family will be wholly normal, utterly content, and ideally American.

Yet, as the book opens, two men plot a crime that will prevent this particular perfection from ever achieving reality. Although Richard Eugene Hickock and Perry Edward Smith are only across the state of Kansas from the Clutters in physical terms, mentally and socially they are a universe away. Both are criminals, both are sexually abnormal, both are physically crippled. They are the utter antithesis of the American Dream, representing as they do almost every trait that society finds distasteful. Yet, in large measure, everything that has brought Hickock and Smith to the verge of their ultimate crime has been in some perverse way caused by the structure of the American myth, or given justification by that myth. The crippling of both men occurred on the highways of America. An automobile accident has shattered Hickock's face, leaving it ". . . tilted, the left side rather lower than the right, with the results that the lips were slightly aslant, the nose askew, and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left eye being truly serpentine, with a venomous, sickly blue squint. . . ."[164] Smith, his legs crushed in a motorcycle accident, struts ". . . on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported. . . ."[165] Hickock's deepest trouble with the law has come as a result of writing bad checks to support a family in the style that the Middle West demanded at mid-century. Smith, the son of a "rugged individualist" Westerner, of the kind so prized in folklore, has been condemned almost from birth to a wretched, wandering life, for vagabonds like Tex John Smith, however revered by the entertainment business, are unwanted anachronisms in a society that demands social responsibility at the same time that it enshrines wanderlust.

It should by now be apparent that both the Clutters and their murderers are, paradoxically, shaped by and symbolic of the basic mythic patterns which underlie American culture. If one group is radically contradictory to the other, it is because the structure of the myth is contradictory. The Clutters are perfect examples of midwestern religiosity, prosperity, and community service, yet they are provincial and unimaginative. Hickock is a check forger, a confidence man, a molester of children, and at the same time imagines himself concerned

[164]Capote, *In Cold Blood,* p. 31.
[165]*Ibid.,* p. 15.

about his parents, devoted to his children, and ". . . a one-hundred-percent normal. . . ."[166] Smith is a dreamer without real ambition, a latent homosexual, and a dangerous psychotic ready to flame into violence at any time; on the other hand, he seems to have some genuine artistic talent, he has a strong, almost puritanical moral code about some things, and in his restless wandering is not much different from the saddle tramps, the Shanes and Virginians that make up so much of the mythology of the American West.

Garrett has suggested the rooting of *In Cold Blood* in Capote's earlier fiction, but his discussion is limited to the aspects of romance which surround that fiction and to Perry Smith's obvious similarty to certain of Capote's fictional characters.[167] While his observations are certainly valid, they do not fully illuminate what Capote is working toward in *In Cold Blood*. What must now be understood is that Hickock and Smith, the active principals of the book, function as "wizard men" in exactly the same way that the fictional personifications of this figure of revelation have been shown to operate. They work, first upon the passive, unresisting Clutter family, then upon the citizens of Holcomb, and, finally, through the perpetuation of the story in *In Cold Blood*, upon the consciousness of America. The meeting of the forces of destruction and the comparative lack of force of the typical American family, ". . . this collision between the desperate, ruthless, wandering, savage part of American life, and the other, which is insular and safe. . . ."[168] is as artistically constructed and symbolically correct as Kay's meeting with the freaks, as Mrs. Miller's ultimate confrontation by Miriam, as Ranney's final realization of the meaning of the telephone calls, and it expands to wider and more all-encompassing meanings. In this collision, the American Dream confronts the American Nightmare, and out of the tragedy of that confrontation comes an ultimately hopeful resolution.

In order to understand how this hopeful resolution is brought about, one must remember that Capote's "wizard men" are not always Mr. Destronelli. It would seem that Hickock and Smith, the mass murderers, could only be destructive forces, and, indeed, in terms of simple reality, they do cause only destruction, and are themselves destroyed. But, as has been pointed out previously, *In Cold Blood* cannot satisfactorily be read only as a factual report. It must be viewed as a literary work, a structure of words ordered, not simply as facts, but as a meaningful, self-contained whole. Thus, within the complex structural and symbolic patterns of the book, the intricate web of similarities, antitheses, and ambiguities makes possible an understanding beyond that of mere facts.

Before it is possible to understand the functions which Richard Hickock and Perry Smith perform, their relationship to each other must be established. To an extent which is almost beyond belief, the two men are alter egos of each other. They emerge, finally, almost as one

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[166] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

[167] Garrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

[168] Capote, quoted by George Plimpton, "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel," *The New York Times Book Review*, January 16, 1966, Section 7, p. 43.

person; like Joel and Randolph at the conclusion of *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* they could not function without each other. Hickock is the rational, thinking man. From the first, it is made plain that it is his plan to kill the Clutters.[169] Perry has the emotional composition actually to perform the murders, but he lacks the incentive and the ability to plan.[170] Although Smith has had by far the more wretched life of the two, it is Hickock who shapes and articulates the rage both men feel toward society.[171] Hickock is also the practical man, practical enough to adjust the clutch in his car before driving four hundred miles to murder someone he has never seen. Smith is a dreamer, a poet, and a musician, so sensitive that he cries at hearing Christmas carols, and so unfeeling that he can laugh heartily at a joke only moments after shotgunning four people.[172] Their complimentary characters are expressed symbolically by their mutiliated bodies: Hickock has a strong and healthy body, but a ruined face; Smith has a handsome face, but his legs have been crushed so badly that they are constantly painful and almost useless. Without each other, Hickock and Smith have fashioned petty criminal careers; together they are able to commit one of the most frightful crimes in Kansas history.

Smith recognizes his affinity with Hickock, and allows him to dominate their partnership.[173] Hickock is interested only in manipulating Smith to strike at the enemies he believes are surrounding him. In this way each moves the other toward self-revelation.[174] Both men lack identity, and their murder of the Clutters is an attempt to establish some kind of identity. Hickock ostensibly hopes that the money which he will obtain by means of the crime will help him to establish a "normal" life. Yet, the particular need for violence that he feels must stem from a deeper source. Smith, in his confession, casts light on Hickock's motivation when he says: "The glory of having everybody at his mercy, that's what excited him."[175] Burning with hatred for the normal world, for those for whom the American Dream has functioned satisfactorily, Hickock seeks to dominate some members of that society, and thus establish an identity commensurate with his self-image. Smith, on the other hand, sees Hickock as a governing force who will direct his activities and eventually allow him to realize his dreams of tropical paradises, free from the intrusion of the authority which has always dominated and injured him. Each uses the other in an attempt to establish identity, and each one's final revelation is only that of futility. No matter how much each may grow to fear and hate the other, both are as powerless to resist the ties which bind them together as Walter Ranney was unable to resist the voice on the telephone, even though it told him of his futility and hopelessness. Hickock and Smith led each other to the final revelation

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[169]Capote, *In Cold Blood,* pp. 14, 22.
[170]*Ibid.*, p. 55.
[171]*Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.
[172]*Ibid.*, p. 256.
[173]*Ibid.*, p. 16.
[174]*Ibid.*, p. 55.
[175]*Ibid.*, p. 239.

of the dimly-lighted corner of Lansing Penitentiary where stand the gallows.

It has been previously noted that strange similarities, perhaps accounted for by converging mythical patterns, exist between the Clutters and the Hickock-Smith partnership. Similarities also exist on a more personal, psychological level. Herbert Clutter, despite the security and solidarity of his position, seems to have doubts about his self-image, of the kind which assail both Hickock and Smith. Clutter's intense devotion to his principles is suggestive of his inability to function without the support of rigid rules and strong organization.[176] A remark made by Nancy Clutter gives the impression that her father is anxious about his image and his family's love for him. Nancy tells her friend Susan Kidwell that she cannot argue with her father because ". . . whenever I start to *say* something, he looks at me as though I must not love him. Or as though I loved him *less*."[177] Although Clutter has established himself as his community's leading citizen, he is not satisfied; he seeks to change even the physical world he lives in by planting fruit trees on the arid western Kansas plains, as though ". . . to contrive, rain or no, a patch of paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden, he envisioned."[178] Despite financial success, he has been unable to find paradise.

Mr. Clutter is like Perry Smith in an even more interesting way. Both are highly moralistic men, yet their morals are at the expense of kindness. Smith finds fault with nearly all those around him because they are to him moral degenerates or perverts, but despite his pompous moralizing, he is capable of killing four helpless people.[179] Clutter, despite his staunch religious beliefs, seems not to be a fundamentally kind man. Indeed, he may use his laws to hurt others. Although Clutter does not dislike Bobby Rupp, Nancy's boyfriend, he is, at the time of the murder, trying to force them to separate, because Bobby is Catholic, and Clutter cannot conceive of his daughter marrying someone of another faith. Her involvement in the matter seems of minimal importance; a Clutter simply does not marry a Catholic.[180] Clutter's furious objections to alcohol might be carried to the same lengths, and thus to the point of cruelty. As a friend of Clutter had once observed: "You've got no mercy. I swear, Herb, if you caught a hired man drinking, out he'd go. And you wouldn't care if his family was starving."[181] Anything which conflicts with Clutter's self-image must be either changed or ignored.

An interesting comparison may also be drawn between Smith and both the Clutter children. Although their backgrounds are utterly antithetical, all are in search of an identity. Nancy sometimes writes themes for English classes in three different styles of script. Asked why, she replies: " 'Because I'm not grown-up enough to be one person with one

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[176]*Ibid.*, p. 8, 10, 18.
[177]*Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
[178]*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
[179]*Ibid.*, p. 321, p. 334.
[180]*Ibid.*, p. 8.
[181]*Ibid.*, p. 10.

kind of signature.' "[182] Kenyon, like Smith, is shy and withdrawn, unsure of where he may fit into the world. His desires conflict with his father's, in the same way in which Smith's conflicted with his own father's. Smith imagines that his father did not want him to have an education because ". . . he didn't want me to learn anything, only how to tote and carry for him. . . . So that I could never escape him."[183] Clutter tells his insurance agent that Kenyon ". . . kind of leans toward being an engineer, or a scientist, but you can't tell me my boy's not a born rancher. God willing, he'll run this place some day."[184]

Mrs. Clutter, the only discordant note in a household that seems from the outside ideal, is a shy, timid woman, out of place in her environment. Like Hickock and Smith, she is an outcast, and in a way analogous to the physical deformity of the killers; her mental illness seems to have been based, at least in part, on physical injury.[185] Like Smith, she is unable to make decisions, and her emotional stability is easily upset.[186] In the same way that Randolph, in *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* retreats into illness to avoid reality, Mrs. Clutter has hidden for years behind the sickroom door, and only as she approaches her death does she seem to be on the verge of finding an identity.

Further comparisons might be drawn between the Clutters and their killers, but one thing seems clear: despite the great gap which exists between the killers and the killed, all are seeking things which have been withheld from them by forces beyond their control. None of them has managed to establish identity which equates with self-image. Irving Malin makes a statement which helps further to enlighten the seemingly paradoxical situation of similar strivings in respected citizens and incorrigible situation of similar strivings in respected citizens and incorrigible criminals. He contends that all people are in love with themselves and that the collision of opposing forces of self-love can lead to violence. "Society," Malin says, "built on imperfect standards of self-love, refuses to acknowledge universal narcissism: it casts the label 'bad' on criminals —that is, on people whose narcissism erupts."[187] Self-love is one of the most important and consistent characteristics of the fictional characters of Capote, and their discovery that the reality of their personalities does not equate with their images of themselves often leads to symbolic death. The Clutters and Hickock and Smith are unable to live up to their ideals of themselves. Hickock and Smith murder in their attempt to find identity, and the Clutters die while still searching for some functional identity. The important difference in their searchings is that the Clutters stay within the bounds of what society considers proper in their quest for identity; the killers go so far beyond the bounds of what society considers proper that they must ultimately be destroyed. Yet it is important to remember that Hickock and Smith have, in one way, acted

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[182]*Ibid.*, p. 57.
[183]*Ibid.*, p. 185.
[184]*Ibid.*, p. 47.
[185]*Ibid.*, p. 7.
[186]*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
[187]Malin, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

as much of the mythology of modern America asserts that they should act. The dominant American hero is still the white-hatted cowboy who takes what he needs by force, by being stronger or faster with his gun than those around him. Hickock and Smith needed many things: money, freedom, and identity. That they chose violence as the means to those ends should surprise only those who have never seen a motion picture, watched television, or read a comic book. Everywhere in modern folklore violence solves problems. Hickock and Smith simply followed a pattern frequently condoned by the varying currents of the American Dream; it is a pattern as old Jesse James and Billy the Kid, both nominal heroes in American folk pantheon.

Society, for all its tolerance of (and, indeed, high regard for) violence and violent men, cannot tolerate them in its everyday life, and when Hickock and Smith step outside the limits which society permits in their search for identity, they become a tremendously disruptive force. Not only do they end the lives of four people, but in so doing they cause an upheaval in the society of Holcomb, Kansas. It has been seen that some of Capote's characters, such as the narrator in "My Side of the Matter," Miss Bobbit, and Holly Golightly, can upset a society. Hickock and Smith function in the same way, except that, instead of causing annoyance or temporary disruption of the functioning of certain customary or legal standards, they cause an almost complete breakdown in the normal pattern of society in Holcmb. Lights stay on all night in the little community, as the townspeople cower in the fear that the killers are among them and may strike again.[188] The people of Holcomb learn, for the first time, to distrust each other. They also learn that things which they had accepted as immutable may be changed. As one woman explains the feeling of shock that envelops Holcomb:

> "Feeling wouldn't have run half so high if this had happened to anyone *except* the Clutters. Anyone *less* admired. Prosperous. Secure. But that family represented everything people hereabouts really value and respect, and that such a thing could happen to them—well, it's like being told there is no God."[189]

They realize that the dream in which they believe can turn to nightmare with terrifying suddenness. The people of Holcomb are simply unprepared for the violent expression of things which, on a more normal scale, they accept as being perfectly reasonable. Like the people who surround Holly Golightly, the people of Holcomb can accept the flouting of conventional codes up to a certain point. To go beyond that point seems monstrous to them.

No life is more completely disrupted than that of Alvin Dewey, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation agent who is assigned to cover the case. In addition to the natural shock he feels at the death of the Clutters, who were his friends, he is tormented by the un-

[188]Capote, *In Cold Blood*, p. 88.
[189]*Loc. cit.*

natural violence of the murders. The brutality of the murders is completely beyond his experience as a law officer, and it comes to have a compelling fascination for him. "I'm haunted by them," he says. "I guess I always will be. Until I know what happened."[190] Dewey's quest for an understanding of the murder and the murderers gives form and focus to the second half of the book. Without the moral standard which Dewey supplies, it would be easy for the reader to lose sight of the horror which Hickock and Smith have perpetrated, and to begin to sympathize with them in their picaresque flight into Mexico, around the United States, back through Kansas, and finally to Las Vegas, where they are captured. It is a fascinating journey, and the killers' ingenuity is remarkable; but there is always the counterpoint of Dewey, growing more thin and hollow-eyed as he searches for a meaning in the killing, to help the reader maintain a perspective in the case.

When Hickock and Smith are at last captured, the citizens of Holcomb can return to a state approaching normalcy, but the degree to which they may return to their old way of life is sharply limited, because part of the structure of their society has been torn away. Herbert Clutter can never again preside at the 4-H club meetings, and Nancy will never again teach the neighbors' children how to bake apple pies. They must learn to exist without the Clutters, in the same way that the narrator of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* must face the reality of continuing his life and career after Holly's departure. Moreover, even after the killers have confessed, the people of Holcomb, their innocence destroyed forever, refuse to accept the idea that someone from their community did not commit the crime. They have been able to rationalize the seemingly senseless crime by thinking that someone who hated Herbert Clutter was responsible for the murders. To find out that two wandering strangers would undertake such a crime for a profit of forty-to-fifty dollars is even more difficult for them to accept than the idea that the murders were committed for revenge. The alteration in the social and individual consciousness of Holcomb cannot be erased in the capture of the killers or their confessions; it is a permanent scar on the body of their vision of life, a scar which shows the continuing force of the killers' disruptive influence.

The ten pages of *In Cold Blood* which detail the confession of Perry Smith are among the most frightening in all literature. The confession expresses their desperate attempt to create an identity through destruction. Among the many things which emerge from what Smith says is a connection of the killers' acts with Capote's nocturnal fiction. Like the characters of "A Tree of Night," "Shut a Final Door," and *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* Hickock and Smith acted under compulsions that neither understood. Neither man really wanted to kill the Clutters, yet neither was able to resist the compulsion to kill. Hickock seems to have been too deeply involved with the power he was wielding, and unable to give up this power and be forced to admit his own cowardice. After a life of frustration, lost hopes, and helplessness, Hickock held ultimate authority

[190]Capote, *In Cold Blood,* p. 148.

for the length of time that he dominated the Clutters. To renounce that power of life and death, particularly in Smith's presence, was more than his ego could bear; yet he might have done so, had it not been for Smith's actions.

From Smith's confession, it is apparent that he was even more unsure of his motives for being in the Clutter home on that night than Hickock. At one point in his confession, Smith says:

> I carried the binoculars and the radio out to the car. It was cold and the wind and the cold felt good. The moon was so bright you could see for miles. And I thought, Why don't I walk off? Walk to the highway, hitch a ride. I sure Jesus didn't want to go back in that house. And yet—How can I explain this? It was like I wasn't part of it. More as though I was reading a story. And I had to know what was going to happen. The end. So I went back upstairs.[191]

One recalls that nothing forced Kay, in "A Tree of Night," to return to her seat with the two freaks, yet she was unable to resist when the mute beckoned to her to accompany him. Futhermore, Joel's attempts to escape from the Landing were always unsuccessful because of his own compulsion to discover the secrets of the Landing and of his own personality. In the same way, Smith was compelled to return to a place which frightened and sickened him, because he had to see not only the end of the events in the Clutter household, but also because he had to know what he would do in such a situation. When he cut Herbert Clutter's throat, the act was literally the ultimate illumination for Perry Smith. Everything which had tormented him in his life was brought to focus in a single instant of rage. In that one moment, he established his final identity, that of a murderer. The moment of recognition was for him, as it was for most of the characters in Capote's nocturnal fiction, the moment of symbolic death. As soon as he used the knife, Smith sealed his doom.

An answer to one of the questions which is unexplained in *In Cold Blood* is suggested by the compulsive search for knowledge exhibited by Capote's fictional characters and by Hickock and Smith. Dewey is tormented by the fact that Mr. Clutter and Kenyon allowed themselves to be tied without any struggle, although both were physically strong and were protective toward the women of the family. Dewey concludes, and the reader is left to conclude along with him, that Clutter did not believe that Hickock and Smith meant to kill them: "Herb *couldn't* have suspected," Dewey thinks, "or he would have fought . . . to the death defending Bonnie's life and the lives of his children."[192] In view of the other manifestations of the power of terror to mesmerize people seen in Capote's fiction, such an explanation does not seem unreasonable in this case. It is certainly no great leap of thought from Kay's surrender to the two grotesques (although she knows what they mean) to the Clutters' meekly submitting to their dooms because they felt powerless to resist. The sudden intrusion of the two killers into their peaceful world must

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[191] *Ibid.*, p. 240.
[192] *Loc. cit.*

have been at least as compelling and terrifying as Kay's encounter with the freaks. In this case, of course, the truth can never be known; no one will ever know what passed through the minds of the Clutters as they awaited death. However, such an interpretation makes possible the creation of a symbolic unity among the killers and the killed. Read in this way, the Clutters would have understood what the killers meant for them only at the very moment of physical death. Thus, the illumination of complete knowledge means death for all six of the principals in the drama.

The machinations of formal judgment and retribution which occupy most of the last third of *In Cold Blood* allow the inclusion of material which is useful in understanding the past histories and the psychological make-up of Hickock and Smith, but, for the most part, the information pertaining to their trial is used only to reinforce what is already known. The other inhabitants of Death Row are fascinating studies in criminal psychology, and help to lend universality to the flaws in the American Dream personified by Hickock and Smith. Two murderers, even murderers of four helpless people, could be an accident, a freak of nature. Yet on Death Row the reader meets other characters who display the same utter lack of feeling that characterizes the Clutters' murderers: Lowell Lee Andrews, "The Nicest Boy in Wolcott," who, his mind filled with vision of the joys of a life of crime, cooly executed his sister and his parents one November night;[193] and George Ronald York and James Douglas Latham, two teen-agers who ". . . shared at least one firm opinion: the world was hateful, and everybody in it would be better off dead."[194] While putting this philosophy into practice, they murdered, without any real motive, seven people.[195] In these pages, casual murder begins to take on a terrifying universality, made the more frightening by the more recent acts of Lee Harvey Oswald, Richard Speck, and Charles Whitman.

Equally intriguing, and in its own way frightening, is the analysis of the legal complexities surrounding the numerous appeals and stays of execution which enable the killers to avoid the gallows for nearly five years after the date originally set for their execution. All of these details, however, do not answer the questions which the book has raised. Even the hanging, with its terrifying juxtaposition of the reporter who hears rain on the roof and is reminded only that he has left the windows down in his new car against the grotesque, vulture-like hangman who waits impatiently to ply his trade, fails to give to the crime the thing which Dewey, and the reader, have sought throughout the greater portion of the book: a ". . . sense of meaningful design."[196]

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[193]*Ibid.*, pp. 312-313.

[194]*Ibid.*, p. 323.

[195]An interesting comparison may be drawn between the scenes on Death Row in *In Cold Blood* and the speeches of the Misfit in Flannery O'Connors' short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Some of the speeches made by Hickock and his fellow convict Latham are very similar in content, phrasing, and rhythm to those of the Misfit.

[196]Capote, *In Cold Blood*, p. 245.

It is only after the hanging is finished that Capote permits the book to come to its conclusive epiphany. In the only sustained use of the flashback technique in the entire narrative, Dewey thinks back to an evening of nearly a year before the night of the hanging. He remembers going to the Garden City cemetery to weed his own father's grave. When he stops to look at the mass grave where the Clutters are buried, he meets Nancy Clutter's best friend, Susan Kidwell. Their conversation seems only as important as that of any two people who once knew each other very well but have not seen each other in several years. At first reading, the conclusion of the book does not seem any more dramatic or effective than an ending with the hanging might have been. A closer examination shows, however, that, by thus ending his book, Capote has made a powerful statement which not only fuses the action of this book but also affirms the position which Capote has taken throughout his career, of the perpetuation of the knowledge gained by the disruption of the social world, even after the death of those responsible for the illumination.

The single use of the flashback technique for this one scene at once hints that it is important. By setting his scene in a graveyard, Capote admits to the permanent presence of death, but the focus remains on the living. The growing wheat which surrounds the cemetery and even the weeds which grow on the grave of Dewey's father emphasize the continuity of nature. Frequent reference is made to Dewey's health, which had seemed to be endangered during his search for the killers but which has now returned to normal, and to the youth and beauty of Susan Kidwell. Shortly after the murders, Susan's high school English teacher had said: "Susan never has got over it. Never will, ask me."[197] Yet now, she is a well-adjusted college girl, who says, "I'm really happy."[198] The implication of Susan's recovery is quite clear: despite tragedy, life continues to function. This implication is reinforced by the knowledge that Bobby Rupp has recently been married, although he had said earlier that he could never care about any girl except Nancy. He, too, has escaped destruction by the tragedy.

Life has also apparently returned to normal in Holcomb. "Oh, there's some talk about paving the streets. But you know Holcomb," Susan says.[199] With the disruptive element of Hickock and Smith out of their midst, the people of Holcomb can settle back into their normal patterns of living. Some of its citizens have died; Judge Tate, who presided over the trial of Hickock and Smith, has only recently died of pneumonia, and one of the daughters of a neighbor of the Clutters has been killed in an automobile accident. For the most part, however, things go on as always. "Death, births, marriages. . . ," Dewey thinks.[200]

Yet no one who was involved in the murders is really untouched. Dewey has been unable to build the house in the country that he had

[197] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[198] *Ibid.*, p. 342.
[199] *Loc. cit.*
[200] *Loc. cit.*

long dreamed of, because of his wife's fearing that what happened to the Clutters might happen to them. Susan, despite her happiness and her plans for the future, will always miss Nancy, and things will never be exactly as she had imagined them. Even Holcomb, exposed for the first time to distrust and suspicion, will not be as it was before. All of the people of Holcomb have suffered a loss of innocence, and, although they may still claim exaggerated virtues for their town, their boasts will always be tempered with the knowledge that it is not paradise. The disruptive force of Hickock and Smith, like the serpent, has brought the evils of knowledge along with its virtues.

All of these bits of knowledge combine to form Dewey's final revelation, which is one of the possibility of knowledge even through destruction. Although Hickock and Smith destroyed four lives while greatly complicating and confusing the lives of many others, the knowledge they brought into the lives of the people of Holcomb has not been wholly without value. Dewey and the others have been able to profit by it and will continue to use it to good advantage. The closing sentence of the book is reminiscent of *The Grass Harp*: "Then, starting home, he walked toward the trees, and under them, leaving behind him the big sky, the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat."[201] In the same way that the experience of the tree house has changed the lives of the people of *The Grass Harp*, the killers have altered those their actions have touched, and even though some of those who have been affected are dead, just as Verena is dead, the wind will continue to tell the story to succeeding generations.

By thus concluding his story, Capote has elevated the murders and the ensuing repercussions to the level of myth, and has made himself the perpetuator of the myth. Despite his claim that he has kept himself strictly out of the story, Capote has involved himself in it as deeply as any of the participants, because it is his artistic control which gives form, and thus meaning, to the story. The murder of the Clutter family, and the subsequent execution of their killers, have no more meaning than any other random event. As an isolated happening, the murder is only more shocking, not more meaningful, than the normal course of life. The use of technique, the compression of the happenings into form, makes possible the discovery of meaning in an otherwise senseless crime. It is only within the structure of words which is *In Cold Blood* that these events have significance.

In a very real sense, then, Capote has taken for himself the role that is symbolically played by Hamurabi as he tells the story of Appleseed to the Baptist Bible Class, by the narrator of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as he recalls the good done by Holly Golightly, and by the grass harp, telling its story of all people of all ages. He has become both the "wizard man" and the perpetuator of the revelations that he causes.

Alvin Dewey's final comprehension of a "meaningful design" in the murders completes the story only for him. While Dewey's revela-

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[201]Capote, *In Cold Blood*, p. 343.

tion allows him to come to terms with his universe in the same limited way that Joel Knox's revelation gives meaning to his existence, it is only through the artistic control which Capote exercises over the materials of the story that Dewey's personal epiphany may be universalized into a conclusion for the book. In the same way that the disembodied voice which speaks to Walter Ranney can focus his life and give it meaning, so the unseen but always controlling voice of Capote focuses the entire fabric of *In Cold Blood*. At the same time Capote's artistry is functioning to give meaning to the book, it also functions to perpetuate the revelation that it achieves. In the act of writing the book, Capote has inseparably fused the roles of "wizard man" and mythmaker.

In the final analysis, the myth and the meaning of *In Cold Blood*, which now become parts of the American Dream that the book has examined and found flawed, form the most complete and hopeful vision that Capote has yet discovered in his work. The dark side of *In Cold Blood*, as grim as anything in Capote's nocturnal fiction, has been joined with, and superseded by, a daylight view more all-encompassing than the resolution of *The Grass Harp*. Prior to *In Cold Blood*, Capote's vision was both divided and limited to individual revelation. Now the wind-whispers that Alvin Dewey hears are saying the same thing that Ernest Hemingway had in mind over forty years ago when he chose to preface *The Sun Also Rises* with a verse from Ecclesiastes: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever. . . ." Although the Clutters and their killers are dead, and although the Dream which shaped both murdered and murderers may be filled with ugliness, violence, and contradiction, there is a life-force which is not altered by individual acts or national mythology. However perverse and destructive an individual, a time, or a place may be, man's fate is an essentially hopeful one, for there will always be flowers to grow in graveyards, and beautiful girls with their lives ahead of them, and wind to bend the wheat.

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