TRUMAN CAPOTE AND THE NONFICTION STORY

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Abstract*: Whether it is called documentary novel, novel-shaped report, or parajournalism, the "nonfiction" genre seems to have gained much terrain within the protean world of American letters over the past few decades. Following Capote's example, leading novelists like Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, etc., have at times resorted to the methods employed by fiction—scene-by-scene construction, imaginative recording of dialogue, interiorization of viewpoint, detailed explication of social mores, concern with style in order to tell a true story with real names and real facts, i.e. they have written history as a novel, and the novel as history, to use Mailer's subtitle to "The Armies of the Night." This, undoubtedly, paved the way for much of the writing during the 1960s (E.L. Doctorow, William Styron), when the borders of the fictional broke down, when fact and fantasy merged, when writers started to focus in a highly critical way on past and present American history. Hence, the present paper aims at focusing on Truman Capote's "nonfiction" prose.*

Keywords**:** *parajournalism,"nonfiction" novel, conversational portraits, American nightmare, unrequited love.*

When *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was published in 1958, Capote was already on his way toward the "nonfiction" novel. He had gradually shifted from the role of protagonist to that of a most detached narrator and, like many writers of the sixties, Capote was attracted to writing about real events and hence looked upon the reportage as the best-suited genre for the purpose he had in mind. Though unanimously rejected by most of the leading writers who considered it a mere literary photograph unsuitable to their artistic dignity, Truman Capote, however, believed that the reportage could reveal unexpected possibilities. His intention was, therefore, to combine the technique of the reportage with that of the novel. According to Capote, from the very first page of his book a novelist starts analyzing the psychological make-up of his characters and considers the facts as a pretext for their behavior. This is what he calls a vertical movement. A newspaper reporter, on the other hand, moves horizontally, his work being conditioned by certain practical requirements: the necessity of addressing a certain readership that expects the reporter to relate a series of events.

Capote believed that by combining the two techniques, he would double the "shock" that a work of art produces upon the reader. The result would be a true event, true in the smallest and the minutest details, doubled by a vertical story, profound and invented, as one usually finds within a novel. This is the much-trumpeted "nonfiction" novel - a narrative form that should make use of all the techniques employed by fiction and, nevertheless, should observe the accuracy of the events. In the famous Norden interview for the *Playboy* magazine, Capote gave full details of what he had in view with his novel: "I was attempting . . . to write a journalistic narrative that employed all the creative devices and techniques of fiction to tell a true story in a manner that would read precisely like a novel." (1968:52) On the other hand, Capote believed that the nonfiction novel should not be confounded with the documentary novel, which contains "neither the persuasiveness of fact nor the poetic altitude fiction is capable of reaching." (Fleming, 1978:39) If the documentary novelist was compelled to oscillate between

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factuality and imaginative power, the "nonfiction" novelist should do his best to bring the two poles together. It was a fascinating ideal, as William Nance considers, "to reach the point at which the inner reality coincides with the outer and the free use of the artist's shaping power results not in distortion but in heightened fidelity." (1970:178) However, by pouring into this book all his previous experience as a fiction writer, Capote could not distance himself from his career as a fiction writer and literally transplanted his deepest personal life to the book. Hence, at times, the objectivity is only apparent and, as most critics admit, Capote's aim seems to have eluded his grasp. Whether Capote indeed managed or not to achieve what he heralded to be a "new" form, we tend to think, that it is of not so great an importance as the writer himself had claimed it to be. What really matters is the work as such, which is "flatly and without question, his biggest, boldest, most serious, most difficult and best written work." (Garrett, 1966:3) Other critics, however, were more reserved about the technique employed and reproached him for having manipulated (without twisting or altering) the facts to make them appear as a Capote novel and for not having explored the latent significance of the criminal acts. (Tanner, 1971:346)

The only difficulty, as Capote himself acknowledged, consisted in the choice of a proper plot. This happened one morning in November 1959, when skimming the *New York Times*, Capote came across a note about a brutal mass-murder in western Kansas. He chose this particular story for the subject of the book he wanted to write and began the research work. Besides the endless interviews he had with the criminals, the detectives and the inhabitants of Holcomb, Kansas, Capote decided to follow systematically the itinerary of the two killers in the United States and Mexico. Three years later, by the time the intense research work was over, he had collected over 6000 pages of notes, before he could proceed to the writing of the novel itself. It was only in 1965 that *In Cold Blood* was finally completed. Culminating one of the most extensive literary publicity campaigns in many years, his novel appeared first in *The New Yorker*, in four weekly installments and in the spring of 1966, in book form.

As mentioned above, the book is based on a report on the premeditative murder of a wealthy rancher and his family in the state of Kansas. The two killers had everything they needed: the stolen car, the thin nylon rope, the adhesive tape to silence the victims, a gun, a knife and plenty of ammunition. Dick Hickock and Perry Smith were possessed by the desire of robbing, killing and settling accounts with a society indifferent and cruel toward them. In cold blood, they killed the four members of Clutter family. Dick and Perry expected to find a lot of money on their victims, but all they could gather was not more than fifty dollars. For two months, they tramped through Mexico and the States, haunted by their obsession with hidden treasures and seldom remembered, without the slightest regret, the murders they had committed. They were caught in December. The court passed a death sentence upon them and five years later, they were both hanged.

Capote's great achievement lies firstly, in the choice and the arrangement of the employed material and, secondly, in the narrative technique employed. Despite the fact that he deliberately refused to appear in the role of the narrator, believing that the writer of "nonfiction" novels should only record the facts and refrain from interfering with observations in their natural development, the omniscience of the invisible author is felt on every page of this mainly chronological narrative.

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With a title that bears a double meaning, referring both to the murders and the executions, *In Cold Blood* is divided into four parts entitled "The Last to See Them Alive," "Persons Unknown," "Answer," and "The Corner." The parts are then subdivided into small sections, eighty-five in number, varying in length from ten lines to twenty-five pages. Arranged according to the contrapuntal technique, the vignettes shift the scene abruptly and Capote admitted that each is "a very defined small story of its kind," (Nance, 1970:186) written separately and arrangeable like the pieces of a huge mosaic. We believe that Capote resorted to the existing structure in order to produce the necessary suspense and to emphasize the contrast between the murderers and their victims.

In the first section, using film techniques (short stills, cross cutting, flashbacks, long shots of the Kansas milieu, and the psychological close-ups of the killers) Capote introduces the reader to the four members of the Clutter family in their environment and with their activities, on the very day of their murder. Simultaneously, the author makes Dick and Perry move toward the crime scene. The scenes are juxtaposed, with the camera-eye constantly shifting between the Clutter ranch, the killers and the village of Holcomb. For the same purpose—to keep the suspense awake—the actual murders are pictured only in the third section of the book, through the confessions of the two killers.

The second section introduces detective Alvin Dewey and covers the first month of investigations. The police investigations are counterpointed to the longer sequences depicting the wanderings of the two murderers, from Kansas City to Mexico City and Acapulco and back to the Mojave Desert. To the people of Holcomb they are still "persons unknown," but with Capote's help, the reader is gradually getting an insight into the lives of the two killers.

Section Three begins with the introduction of Floyd Wells, the informer and his statement, through which the authorities finally learn about the identity of the two killers, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. Then the detectives travel to question members of the suspects' families, and the section ends with the arrest in Last Vegas and their separate confessions. Capote realizes the dramatic high point of the novel by putting the account of the murders in the confessions of Dick and Perry, and then heightens the effect of immediacy by narrating the confession scene in the present tense.

The last section is devoted to the actual trial, the last years spent in the death row and, finally, to the hanging. It is in this part that *In Cold Blood* achieves a great documentary value, becoming the "work of virtuoso" (Garrett,1966:3) that manages to shed light on the murderer's psyche. Moreover, since two important events of sections three and four—Perry's confession and the hanging—are looked upon and narrated from detective Dewey's point of view, the latter tends to become the central 'conscience' in the novel, a spokesman for the author. Consequently, one of the most often asked questions arises: Why did Capote not refer to the hanging scene directly, as it is known that the author attended the hanging at the request of Perry and Dick? Sandy Campbell, Capote's friend wrote the following in his diary:

> Everybody behaved wonderfully. When Perry went up to the gallows he stopped in front of Truman, kissed him, and said, 'Adios amigo' . . . when Perry was dead and taken away the warden came up to Truman and gave him an envelope. 'Mr. Smith wanted you to have this,' he said. It contained all the money Truman had sent Perry over the five years. Truman sat there and burst into tears. (Fleming, 1978:39)

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The most plausible answer would be that Capote was forced to sacrifice many deeply moving elements and scenes for the sake of his theory about the "nonfiction" novel, for the sake of keeping himself entirely out of the story.

Although this novel is exclusively built upon facts that had actually happened, Capote, nevertheless, recognized the opportunity of coming back to the theme of his earlier books, but of course, in a new dimension. The new dimension refers to the fact that the happenings no longer take place in the inner, 'private' world of the character, but have extended over modern America, illustrating the clash between the American dream and the American nightmare, or like Capote himself formulated it: "desperate, savage, violent America in collision with same, safe, insular even smug America—people who have even chance against people who have none." (Garrett, 1966:4)

Similarly to his previous novels *In Cold Blood*, too, is built antithetically. With the victims, on the one hand, the American dream seems to have come true, Mr. Clutter symbolizing everything that has made America be proud of herself; he is a self-made man, skilful and honest, a supporter of the First Methodist Church and of his community, known and respected in certain in Washington offices as a member of the Federal Farm Credit Board during the Eisenhower administration. Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, the two killers, on the other hand, are representative of the American nightmare. Opposed to the Clutters and victims of the society, they are those who have failed in their aspirations mainly because of the social background they live in.

Yet, paradoxically, both killers and victims share the same common point that is true for all Capote protagonists, i.e. the search for identity and for a place in society. Though successful in life, neither Mr. Clutter, nor Kenyon, his son, nor Nancy, his youngest daughter, seem to have completed this process. Nancy, for example, in her diary keeps changing her style of script and Kenyon who, feeling deserted after his friend already sixteen starts going out with a girl, prefers solitude. The murderers, on the other hand, cannot bring to terms their status in the actual world with their reflection, caused by their own narcissism. According to Irving Malin, "usually the cruel ambivalence is resolved only through violence . . . Death is the true reflection, offering peace and silence." (1968:15) Hence, the murders are closely related to the killers' search for identity.

Their 'social' failure, made Perry and Dick unable to control their destiny. Perry, for instance, was not 'bad,' but he never had a chance in life. He committed the murders because his life had been a constant accumulation of disappointments and bad luck, until the moment he found himself in a 'psychological deadlock' in the house of the Clutters on that particular November night. According to Erich Fromm, "it is not human nature that makes a sudden appearance, but the destructive potential that is fostered by certain permanent conditions (i.e. deprivation) and mobilized by sudden traumatic events." (1975:303) The Clutters represented for Perry the symbol of all his deprivations, of what he had always lacked in life. The extended and repeated absence of one of his parents, a chaotic family life, generated the later deprivations, and in keeping with a famous psychoanalytical principle, "*deprivation generates aggressiveness*." Psychologists all agree that a neurotic submitted to deprivation is constantly in an imminent state of aggressiveness. However, with this category of criminals, the personality is, in fact, a consequence of hesitations, of incapacity and awkwardness in social relations. (Dragomirescu, 1976:19-20) On the other hand, the social relations of the neurotic are superficial and cold, giving them a note of loneliness

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and isolation. For them people do not have an actual existence so that their reactions completely lack warmth or any other positive manifestations. Such persons are inclined to murder if strained with magnified aggressive energy (the neurotic can easily become psychotic). But these destructive explosions do not break out without any reason. Their criminal potentialities can be stimulated, when the future victim is considered a key personality in a traumatic vision of his criminal force. These criminals seem to be rational, coherent, but their actions are strange and apparently make no sense at all. This is the murder without apparent motive.

Perry Smith can be included into this category of criminals. With a childhood marked by violence and by his parents' lack of concern, deprived of love and brought up without guidance and without a sense of moral values, but with an intellect above average, despite his poor education, Perry Smith shows definite signs of mental illness: persecution mania (high sensitivity to the faintest criticism and misinterpretation of well-meant advice) and emotional instability (state of irritation poorly controlled and easy to release at the faintest feeling of despise and deceit), which, when combined, trigger paranoiac behavior in relations with other people. As mentioned above, the night he killed the Clutters, Perry Smith was in a 'psychological deadlock.' Dr. Joseph Satten of the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, after examining Perry, opinionated that the night he killed Mr. Clutter, Perry was indeed in a "mental eclipse deep inside a schizophrenic darkness" (Capote, 1978:302) and that he was not actually killing a man in flesh and blood, but rather a key figure, the symbol of all his deprivations in his early life: his father, the nuns at the orphanage who had ridiculed and beaten him, the hated Army sergeant, the parole officer who had ordered him to stay out of Kansas. In his confession, Perry Smith said: "I didn't want to harm the man. I thought he was a very nice gentleman. Soft-spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat . . . They [the Clutters] never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it." (Capote, 1978:302) The doctor concluded that only one murder was psychologically important and that the other three were logically motivated if Mr. Clutter was killed, the others, Nancy, Kenyon and their mother, had to be killed, too.

Dick Hickock, too, has an intellect above the average and very well organized, grasping ideas easily. He is very careful of what is going on round him and at first sight does not seem to show any signs of mental confusion. Nevertheless, doctors identified emotional abnormality and severe character disorder, since he knew perfectly what he was doing and still went on doing it. Very impulsive in his actions, Hickock shows no discernment with respect to consequences or the future trouble he and the persons round him might get into. Moreover, Dick cannot tolerate feelings of deprivation and relief comes only through antisocial activity. In spite of his low opinion of himself and of his deeds, secretly considering himself inferior to others and sexually deficient, Dick, paradoxically, turns out to be a sexual maniac, revealing his pedophiliac tendencies, his attraction to underage girls on every possible occasion. Moreover, later on while in Mexico, Dick does not refrain from having sex with a prostitute in the presence of Perry and, finally, in jail, next to law literature, he reads mainly sex novels. There is an element in Dick's carnality that disgusts Perry, and Capote writes: "Perry, after being lent one of these books by Dick, returned it with an indignant note: 'Degenerate filth for filthy degenerated minds!" (1978:322) All these sentiments of deprivation seem to be

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compensated by the illusions of being rich and powerful and the tendency of boasting with his actions.

Finally, Capote asked himself the question: "What would have happened if Perry Smith had hesitated to kill the Clutters?" and "Would Dick have done it alone?" The answer is negative, because all doctors identified a so-called 'ability of killing.' Perry's psychosis created this ability of killing. Dick Hickock was only ambitious; he was, indeed, able to plan a murder to the smallest details but not to carry it out. Dick had a criminal mind but on a small scale. His violent acts were only supposed to impress Perry. And so he did, because the latter liked to see Dick as a 'tough guy' and a 'totally masculine' man. He himself was too delicate to be 'tough,' but, paradoxically, capable of committing a murder.

After they had committed the murders, both Perry and Dick reached the same conclusion, that the killing caused them a full pleasure. The moment they killed the Clutters they felt an immense relief. They both admitted that it was easier to kill a man than to cash a false cheque. Handling in a false cheque requires skill and style, while killing a man means only to pull the trigger.

After the stunning success of *In Cold Blood*, the zigzag line of Capote's work, by his own description having reached the fourth and the last cycle by now, stagnated for about seven years. Most of this time, according to Capote (1981:xi-xviii), was spent in reading and selecting, re-writing and indexing letters, diaries and journals for the years 1943-1965. The purpose was to use all this material in a book entitled *Answered Prayers*, another "nonfiction" novel. In 1972, Capote began to work on this book and within the following three years he managed to produce four chapters out of sequence and which were published by *Esquire* magazine between 1975-1976, against the advice coming from Joseph M. Fox, his Random House editor: "Mojave" (June, 1975)[1], "La Côte Basque" (November, 1975), "Unspoiled Monsters" (May, 1976), and "Kate McCloud" (December, 1976).

> I was against this plan, feeling that he was revealing too much of the book too soon, and said so, but Truman, who considered himself a master publicist, was not to be deterred… As it turned out, he *didn't* know what he was doing. 'Mojave' was the first chapter to appear and caused some talk, but the next, 'La Côte Basque,' produced an explosion which rocked that small society which Truman had set out to describe. Virtually every friend he had in this world ostracized him for telling thinly disguised tales out of school, and many of them never spoke to him again. (Capote, 1987:xiv-xv)

Capote's reaction followed almost instantly: "What did they expect? I'm a writer, and I use everything. Did all those people think I was there just to entertain them?" (1987:xv) But in spite of the apparently feigned indifference vs. the public reaction to those parts of the book already published, Capote did stop working at *Answered Prayers*, at least temporarily. The reason set forth was a creative crisis (the search for a literary form that should successfully combine all the other forms of writing) doubled by a personal one (alcohol and drugs) that broke out in September 1977.

[1] Originally, Capote intended "Mojave" to be the second chapter of the future novel, but a few years later he changed his mind, decided that it did not belong in the book, and it was published as a separate short story in *Music for Chameleons* in 1980.

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> The problem was: how can a writer successfully combine within a single form—say the short story—all he knows about every other form of writing? For this was why my work was insufficiently illuminated; the voltage was there but, by restricting myself to the techniques of whatever form all the other forms I was working in I was not using everything I knew about writing, all I'd learned from film scripts, plays, reportage, poetry, the short story, novellas, the novel. A writer ought to have all his colors, all his abilities available on the same palette for mingling (and, in suitable instances, simultaneous application). But how? (1987:xvii)

He seems to have found the answer to this question in the "conversational portraits," which for Capote became a kind of method, or rather a framework into which he could pour and assimilate everything he knew about writing. In these new experiments, Capote set himself center stage in order to incite the conversation partners into confession and keep the discussion going. In this way, Capote's partners open their hearts and the inner life of the characters is displayed in front of the readers; they characterize themselves unwillingly. Then, these commonplace conversations with everyday people—the superintendent of his building, a masseur at the gym, an old school friend, his dentist—were reconstructed in a severe, minimal manner. Eventually, boasted Capote, he developed a new style on which the pieces collected in *Music for Chameleons* (1980) are based.

The fourteen texts of this volume are arranged in three different sections: Music for Chameleons, Handcarved Coffins and Conversational Portraits. The first section, containing the title-story too, is composed of short and partly autobiographical sketches. Out of these six texts, two stories are more interesting—"Dazzle" and "Mojave."

"Dazzle," which appeared first in *Vogue* in 1979, is a story that much resembles certain earlier pieces based on memories from Capote's childhood, like "A Christmas Memory" or "The Thanksgiving Visitor." But unlike those earlier pieces, which are exclusively set in the past and in which the tone is nostalgic and sentimental, with the present story, only the major part is set in the past, the one in which the fifty-two-year old Capote narrates an incident that practically sheds light on the confusion about the sexual identity of the eight-year old Capote. At the end of the story, the narrator shifts abruptly to the present and introduces his father, Arch Persons, who actually plays no part at all in the incident recalled. Too drunk to attend his grandmother's funeral, yet grieving in his own way for her death, Truman gets a phone call from his elderly father, who is furious at his son's behavior and curses him, saying that his grandmother "died with your picture in her hand." (1987:64) After apologizing, the narrator hangs up because the forty-four-year-old bond between the boy's secret wish of being turned from male to female by magic, i.e. Mrs. Ferguson, the mysterious sorceress asked to do the magic, and the grandmother, the owner of the "dazzling yellow stone dangling from a slender gold-chain necklace," (1987:53) i.e. the payment for the magic, will have to remain secret even beyond death, as it is founded on an act of theft committed by a boy and the ensuing feeling of guilt and betrayal. In fact, the story, without adopting the remorseful tone expected normally from a declaration of guilt, assumes the form of a confession, the narrator providing the explanation and the justification for his attitude of indifference vs. his grandmother: "She loved me and I wanted to love her, but until she died, and she lived beyond ninety, I kept my distance,

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behaved indifferently. She felt it, but she never knew what caused my apparent coldness, nor did anyone else, for the reason was part of an intricate guilt." (1987:53)

"Mohave," on the other hand, is a fictitious story that bears no resemblance to any other Capote story. Moreover, we would incline to believe that it resembles rather a Carson McCullers story, if we take into account its thematic and its structural pattern. "Mohave" employs the techniques of the frame, by placing a story within a story, and of doubling, by turning the second story into a double of the first. In fact, we are dealing with two concentric love triangles, the theme being that of loneliness and frustration due to unrequited love. Two women, Sarah and Ivory Hunter, the former, rich, elegant and upper-class, and the latter, a burlesque dancer and stripper, poor and lower class, betray their husbands. Both give their lovers gifts, paid for with their husbands' money.

The doubling is made even more definite by the fact that both men share the first name George and that at the time of their meeting in the Mojave Desert, twenty years earlier, the two men appear as opposites, inasmuch as the two wives are also opposites. Sarah's husband, George Whitelaw, was then a young Yale graduate hitchhiking across the country and with the prospects of a successful career before him, while Ivory's husband, George Schmidt was an old, fat and blind man, who had been a masseur for over fifty years. The difference, however, between the two destinies lies mainly in the form of betrayal. While George Schmidt, betrayed in secret, is robbed of all his possessions and then abandoned in the desert, in the hope to die from the scorching heat, never to see his wife again who elopes with her younger lover, George Whitelaw is betrayed in a subtler and much more sophisticated way. Sarah, after the birth of their two unwanted children, refuses to have sex with her husband but takes a lover, without any apparent reason. She has no intention at all to leave her husband, whom she actually loves; moreover, in order to keep him satisfied, she helps him find his mistresses:

> For when they had stopped sleeping together, they had begun discussing together—indeed, collaborating on—each of his affairs . . . A few he had discovered himself; the majority were 'romances' she herself had stage-managed, friends she'd introduced him to, confidantes she had trusted to provide him with an outlet but not to exceed the mark. (1987:41-2)

To complicate things even more, as if in jest, Capote introduces a third love triangle, in which the roles are reversed and in which homosexual love combines with heterosexual love. It is the story of Jaime Sanchez, Sarah's hairdresser, who shares his apartment with his attractive lover, a young dentist named Carlos. The two are happy until Angelita, Jaime's cousin, arrives. Now Carlos, having fallen in love with Angelita, wants to marry her and have children. Moreover, the girl insists that after the wedding the three should live together in the same flat. In doing so, the former lovers will be forced to live like brothers, a quite unexpected practical joke that life seems to play on them. So, everyone in the story, be he lover or beloved, is unhappy. What unites the three distinctive stories is the principle according to which the object of one's love, the beloved person, turns away from the initial lover and becomes, in turn, a lover.

The second section of the collection contains a short nonfiction novelette entitled "Handcarved Coffins, A Nonfiction Account of an American Crime," which Capote claimed to be a report about a series of horrible murders. During 1979, Andy

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Warhol's magazine *Interview*[2] published a series of "Conversations with Capote" covering miscellaneous writings. "Handcarved Coffins" appeared as the December 1979 contribution to those conversations, before it was included in *Music for Chameleons*.

The idea is that Capote, somehow angered by some negative reviews of *In Cold Blood* in which he had been blamed for his reported conversations and for not having taken down any notes while interviewing people, decided to play a joke on all his complainers. And with "Handcarved Coffins" the joke was successful, as Capote made full use of the eyewitness technique combined with the full range of techniques of film, fiction and nonfiction. The fact that the writer himself serves as an interviewer supports the credibility of the story, but other elements, however, like the unnamed state, the unnamed town and the unnamed "State Bureau of Investigation" seem to contradict the truth of the story.

The story is about a series of murders committed by a fanatical killer, allegedly Robert Quinn, who takes vengeance on the nine members of the commission that voted to change the boundaries of Blue River on which Quinn's ranch borders. When Capote arrives in the small western town, four murders have been committed and the fifth is already scheduled. In every case, the killer notified the intended victim by sending a miniature handcarved coffin with the victim's photograph in it. Within a short period, the victim was slain in a horrible way. Every murder has been committed in a very different way, showing the killer's ingenuity. Although the murderer is actually identified by the detective Jake Pepper, he is never brought to justice, for lack of evidence.

Critics generally agree that Capote's sudden return to an extensive use of the gothic elements (bizarre murders, atmosphere of horror, use of snakes, romance, adultery, telepathy, poisonous substances, etc.) of the early dark stories no longer produces an equally powerful psychological effect. "Handcarved Coffins" comes nowhere near the shorter or longer 'nocturnal' pieces being only a pastiche of the masterpieces of his earlier years.

In the general outline of the volume *Music for Chameleons*, this central piece of fiction seems to represent an intermediate step, being self-centered, like the stories of the first section, and dialogued, like the "conversational portraits" of the third section. Capote's conversation partners belong to various social strata, ranging from acquaintances, like Mary Sanchez, a housekeeper in the habit of smoking grass, or Big Junebug Johnson, a New Orleans waitress, to the two prisoners at San Quentin Robert M. and Robert Beausoleil and, last but not least, to three famous figures of the American artistic scene like the singer Pearl Bailey, the actress Marilyn Monroe, and the novelist Willa Cather.

After Capote's death in 1984, his editor put together the remaining three stories: "Unspoiled Monsters," "Kate McCloud," and "La Côte Basque" as the work

[2] The artist and filmmaker Andy Warhol, b. Pennsylvania, Aug. 6, 1928?, d. Feb. 22, 1987, was a founder and major figure of the pop art movement. A graduate (1949) of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, he gained success in New York City as a commercial artist in the 1950s. Later in the 1960s, Warhol made a series of experimental films dealing with such ideas as time, boredom, and repetition; they include *Sleep* (1963) and *The Chelsea Girls* (1966). A celebrity himself until his death, he founded *Interview* magazine and published *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (1975) and *America* (1985). (Year 2000 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia ®)

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that was retitled *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel* (1987). In book form, *Answered Prayers* is much the same as the stories, which Capote had published separately in *Esquire*, except for two significant changes. One change refers to the reversed order and the second change refers to the removal of the story "Mohave."

The predominant motif of the stories is sexual. Starting with sexual humor and passing on to sexual intercourse, the desire for it and the frequency of the act, the three so-called 'stories' are but a collection of vignettes and tales about socialites, artists, writers, movie stars, members of the jet-set, real and fictional people, who appear either under their real names or under easily identifiable pseudonyms. Taking the form of gossip, the pieces are very loose, yet there are feeble signs of structuring. The first two stories make some attempt at plot, whereas the third has no plot at all. The second unifying element, beside the motif, is the recurrence of a narrator, P. B. Jones, a kind of Capote *Doppelgänger* who is, at times, a failed writer, a prostitute, and a masseur but, all in all, a teller of dirty jokes. Finally yet importantly, in *Answered Prayers*, Capote resorted again to some of the techniques of his earlier works: circularity, recollections, time shifts and cinematic devices (stills, collage and scene shifts) to somehow support the subject matter of the entire book.

Once people read the stories and recognized what Capote was doing, they closed ranks and turned against him. Overnight his friends became his enemies and his entire career was destroyed. But, unfortunately, they did not seem to grasp Capote's message. Whether people frown or not, whether they take delight or not at these piquant pages, the message will not change: in all instances, life is indeed a joke, and above all often a bitter one.

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