



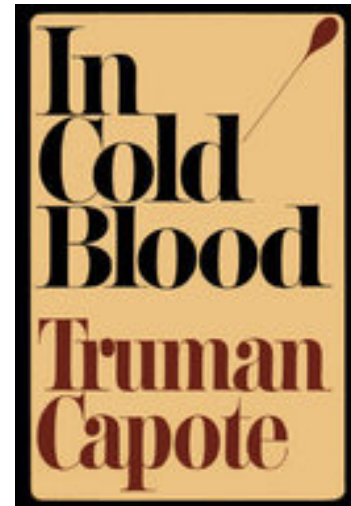
***In Cold Blood: a true account of a multiple murder and its consequences***

**By Truman Capote**

**Publication info: 1965**

**Random House, NY**

**Pags: 343**



**Summary**

With the publication of this book, Capote permanently ripped through the barrier separating crime reportage from serious literature. As he reconstructs the 1959 murder of a Kansas farm family and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, Capote generates suspense and empathy.

*In Cold Blood* was a groundbreaking work when released in 1966. With it, author Truman Capote contributed to a style of writing in which the reporter gets so far inside the subject, becomes so familiar, that he projects events and conversations as if he were really there. The style has probably never been accomplished better than in this book. Capote combined painstaking research with a narrative feel to produce one of the most spellbinding stories ever put on the page. Two two-time losers living in a lonely house in western Kansas are out to make the heist of their life, but when things don't go as planned, the robbery turns ugly.

*From the New York Times Book Review*

The resulting chronicle is a masterpiece--agonizing, terrible, possessed, proof that the times, so surfeited with disasters, are still capable of tragedy. there, the book is a real-life look into murder, prison, and the criminal mind.

## Reviews

### **Publishers Weekly Review: /\* Starred Review \*/**

In the wake of the award-winning film *Capote*, interest in the author's 1965 true crime masterpiece has spiked. Capote's spellbinding narrative plumbs the psychological and emotional depths of a senseless quadruple murder in America's heartland. In the audio version, narrator Brick keeps up with the master storyteller every step of the way. In fact, Brick's surefooted performance is nothing short of stunning. He settles comfortably into every character on this huge stage—male and female, lawman and murderer, teen and spinster—and moves fluidly between them, generating the feel of a full-cast production. He assigns varying degrees of drawl to the citizens of Finney County, Kans., where the crimes take place, and supplements with an arsenal of tension-building cadences, hard and soft tones, regional and foreign accents, and subtle inflections, even embedding a quiver of grief in the voice of one character. This facile audio actor delivers an award-worthy performance, well-suited for a tale of such power that moves not only around the country but around the territory of the human psyche and heart.

### **Kirkus Reviews**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* \*\*\*"There's got to be something wrong with somebody who'd do a thing like that." This is Perry Edward Smith, talking about himself. "Deal me out, baby... I'm a normal." This is Richard Eugene Hickock, talking about himself. They're as sick a pair as Leopold and Loeb and together they killed a mother, a father, a pretty seventeen year old and her brother, none of whom they'd seen before, in cold blood. A couple of days before they had bought a 100 foot rope to garrote them-- enough for ten people if necessary. This small pogrom took place in Holcomb, Kansas, a lonesome town on a flat, limitless landscape: a depot, a store, a cafe, two filling stations, 270 inhabitants. The natives refer to it as "out there." It occurred in 1959 and Capote has spent five years, almost all of the time which has since elapsed, in following up this crime which made no sense, had no motive, left few clues-- Just a footprint and a remembered conversation. Capote's alternating dossier Shifts from the victims, the Clutter family, to the boy who had loved Nancy Clutter, and her best friend, to the neighbors, and to the recently paroled perpetrators: Perry, with a stunted child's legs and a changeling's face, and Dick, who had one squinting eye but a "smile that works." They had been cellmates at the Kansas State Penitentiary where another prisoner had told them about the Clutters-- he'd hired out once on Mr. Clutter's farm and thought that Mr. Clutter was perhaps rich. And this is the lead which finally broke the case after Perry and Dick had drifted down to Mexico, back to the midwest, been seen in Kansas City, and were finally picked up

in Las Vegas. The last, even more terrible chapters, deal with their confessions, the law man who wanted to see them hanged, back to back, the trial begun in 1960, the post-ponements of the execution, and finally the walk to "The Corner" and Perry's soft-spoken words-- "It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize."... It's a magnificent Job-- this American tragedy--with the incomparable Capote touches throughout. There may never have been a perfect crime, but if there ever has been a perfect reconstruction of one, surely this must be it.

### **Background Context**

In "Cold Blood" began, as the story goes, when Truman Capote came across a 300-word article in the back of the New York Times describing the unexplained murder of a family of four in rural Kansas.



Nancy Clutter,  
HS photo

"Holcomb, Kan., Nov. 15 [1959] (UPI) -- A wealthy wheat farmer, his wife and their two young children were found shot to death today in their home. They had been killed by shotgun blasts at close range after being bound and gagged ... There were no signs of a struggle, and nothing had been stolen. The telephone lines had been cut."



Kenyon Clutter  
HS yearbook photo

"Cold Blood" was first published as a four-part serial in The New Yorker, beginning with the September 25, 1965, issue. The piece was an immediate sensation, particularly in Kansas, where The New Yorker had distributed the usual number of copies, which sold out immediately. "Cold Blood" was first published as a book by Random House in January 1966.

"Cold Blood" is a 1966 book by American author Truman Capote. The book details the brutal 1959 murders of Herbert Clutter, a wealthy farmer from Holcomb, Kansas, and his wife and two of their children. When Capote learned of the quadruple murder before the killers were captured, he decided to travel to Kansas and write about the crime. Bringing his childhood friend and fellow author Harper Lee along, together they interviewed local residents and investigators assigned to the case and took thousands of pages of notes. The killers, Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Smith, were arrested not long after the murders, and Capote ultimately spent six years working on the book. It is considered the originator of

the non-fiction novel and the forerunner of the New Journalism movement, although other writers, like Rodolfo Walsh, had already explored the genre in books like Operación Masacre. The plot weaves a complicated psychological story of two parolees who together commit a mass murder, an act they were not capable of individually. Capote's book also details the lives of the victims and the effect the crime had on the community where they lived. A large part of the story involves the dynamic psychological relationship of the two felons that culminated in this senseless crime. In Cold Blood is often regarded by critics as a pioneering work of true crime.

**In Cold Blood: a Legacy in photos (2005 online article)**

[http://www2.ljworld.com/photos/galleries/2005/apr/03/in\\_cold\\_blood\\_a\\_legacy\\_in\\_photos/](http://www2.ljworld.com/photos/galleries/2005/apr/03/in_cold_blood_a_legacy_in_photos/)

**Film Adaptations**

The book itself was made into a 1967 film of the same name by Richard Brooks, who directed and adapted the screenplay. It starred Robert Blake as Perry Smith and Scott Wilson as Richard Hickock. John Forsythe played the investigator (Al Dewey) from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation who apprehended the killers. The film was shot in black and white. It was nominated for four Academy Awards: Best Director, Best Original Score, Best Cinematography and Best Adapted Screenplay. The film was also adapted into a 1996 miniseries starring Anthony Edwards and Eric Roberts, portraying, respectively, Hickock and Smith.

Capote's experiences in writing the story, and his subsequent fascination with the murders, have been adapted into two films. Capote (2005) starred Philip Seymour Hoffman, who won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Truman Capote, and Catherine Keener as Harper Lee. The film was critically acclaimed and was nominated for four other Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress (Keener), Best Director (Bennett Miller), and Best Adapted Screenplay (Dan Futterman). A year later the film Infamous, starring Toby Jones as Capote and Sandra Bullock as Lee, was released to favorable reviews.



**Biography (1924-1984)**

<http://www.capotebio.com/>

Truman (born Truman Streckfus Persons) Capote was born in New Orleans on Sept. 30, 1924, and many of his works have Southern settings. OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS (1948) tells of a boy's bittersweet upbringing in the rural South. A TREE OF NIGHT, AND

OTHER STORIES (1949) and the novel THE GRASS HARP (1951) present eccentric characters and unusual situations. Capote wrote the short novel BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1958) about a light-hearted playgirl in New York City. He wrote the book and lyrics for "House of Flowers" (1954), a musical set in the West Indies. Three books of fiction were published after Capote's death on Aug. 25, 1984. They are an unfinished novel, ANSWERED PRAYERS (1986); THE COMPLETE STORIES OF TRUMAN CAPOTE (2004); and his first novel, written in 1943, SUMMER CROSSING (2005). TOO BRIEF A TREAT: THE LETTERS OF TRUMAN CAPOTE was published in 2004.

Capote wrote much nonfiction. THE MUSES ARE HEARD (1956) describes his trip to the Soviet Union with the cast of the opera "Porgy and Bess." MUSIC FOR CHAMELEONS (1980) mixes fiction, reporting, and memoirs.

Truman Capote was one of the most notorious writers of his time. Bitter public feuds with contemporaries such as Jackie Onassis, Norman Mailer, and Gore Vidal made Capote more than an author. His overt homosexuality, wit, and knockout opinions kept him on television and in magazines as a major personality.



**Capote in 1948**

Capote did not attend college. Instead, he published a few short stories and eventually a first novel, Other Voices, Other Rooms, in 1948. A succession of books followed, as did involvement with the stage and film. In 1958 he wrote Breakfast at Tiffany's. Finally, after almost ten years living in Europe, he returned to the United States in the late 1950s hoping to compose what he termed "an epic nonfiction novel."

In Cold Blood was that book. In 1959, Capote noticed a small newspaper item describing the mysterious murder of a Kansas ranch family of four. He decided that this might be the perfect story for him to write about. Five years of intense research followed, during which time Capote became very close to the two murderers, Richard Eugene Hickock and Perry Edward Smith. He talked to the townspeople of Holcomb, where the murders were committed, and nearby Garden City. He followed the police investigation and the eventual appeals process until the execution of Hickock and Smith in 1965. During interviews he never took notes or

used a tape recorder; instead he was able to transcribe the interviews from memory, a skill he had been practicing for years.

The result, published in January 1966, was a long and highly acclaimed novel, a success critically and commercially. It is a favorite among schoolchildren and inmates alike. According to Capote, every word of *In Cold Blood* is true. And Capote himself never appears in the book. He believed that the key to good journalism was making the author invisible.

## **Bibliography**

1945 Miriam Short story; published in *Mademoiselle* (magazine)

1948 Other Voices, Other Rooms Novel

1949 A Tree of Night and Other Stories Collection of short stories

approx. 1949 Summer Crossing Novel; posthumously published 2005

1951 The Grass Harp Novel

1952 The Grass Harp Play

1953 Beat the Devil Original screenplay

1954 House of Flowers Broadway musical

1955 Carmen Therezinha Solbiati - So Chic Short story (Brazilian jet-setter Carmen Mayrink Veiga); published in *Vogue* (magazine)[citation needed]

1956 The Muses Are Heard Nonfiction

1956 "A Christmas Memory" Short story; published in *Mademoiselle* (magazine)

1957 "The Duke in His Domain" Portrait of Marlon Brando; published in *The New Yorker*; Republished in *Life Stories: Profiles from The New Yorker* (2001)

1958 Breakfast at Tiffany's Novella

1960 The Innocents Screenplay based on *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James; 1962

Edgar Award, from the Mystery Writers of America, to Capote and William Archibald for Best Motion Picture Screenplay

1963 Selected Writings of Truman Capote Midcareer retrospective anthology; fiction and nonfiction

1964 A short story appeared in *Seventeen* magazine

1965 *In Cold Blood* "Nonfiction novel"; Capote's second Edgar Award (1966), for Best Fact Crime book

1968 *The Thanksgiving Visitor* Holiday story published as a gift book

1973 *The Dogs Bark* (anthology) Collection of travel articles and personal sketches

1975 "Mojave" and "La Cote Basque, 1965" Short stories from Answered Prayers; published in Esquire

1976 "Unspoiled Monsters" and "Kate McCloud" Short stories from Answered Prayers; published in Esquire

1980 Music for Chameleons Collection of short works mixing fiction and nonfiction

1983 One Christmas Holiday story published as a gift book

1987 Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel Published posthumously

## **In Cold Blood Characters (from spark notes)**

Perry Edward Smith - Along with Dick, one of the two murderers of the Clutter family. He is a short man, with a large torso but small legs. His legs were badly injured in a motorcycle accident. He wants very much to be educated, and he considers himself quite intelligent and artistic. His childhood was lonely and disorganized. His criminal record seems to be a natural extension of the strange environments in which he grew up.

Richard Eugene Hickock - Along with Perry, one of the two murderers of the Clutter family. Also a small man, Dick grew up in Kansas, was married twice, and is jailed for passing bad checks. He is a practical man who exudes confidence and cruelty, but in reality he is not as ruthless or brave as he seems.

Herbert Clutter - The father of the Clutter family. His wife is Bonnie. He has four children: two older daughters who have moved out, and Nancy and Kenyon. His large property, River Valley Farm, keeps him moderately wealthy. Starting with little, he has built up a large, successful farm. He is a community leader, involved with many organizations. He is a gentle man, a strict Methodist. He served on the Federal Farm Credit Board under President Eisenhower.

Bonnie Clutter - Herbert's wife, Bonnie, cannot keep up with his public image as a leader, and she withdraws into the home. Suffering depressive mental disorders, she spends a great deal of time in bed.

Nancy Clutter - Along with Kenyon, one of the two youngest Clutter children. They both still live at home. She is "the darling" of the town, a class president and future prom queen. Like her father, she is very organized.

Kenyon Clutter- old, Kenyon loves to tinker with carpentry and machines.

Bobby Rupp - Nancy's steady boyfriend, Bobby lives nearby.

Alvin Dewey - An investigator for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI), Dewey is the agent responsible for much of western Kansas. He becomes very involved in the case, to the distress of his wife, Marie, and his two small boys.

Harold Nye - One of Dewey's principal KBI assistants. Nicknamed "Brother Nye," he is the youngest of the group. During the capture and interrogation of Smith and Hickock, he has the flu.

Roy Church - The oldest of the KBI assistants, Church is nicknamed "Curly" and is supposedly the fastest draw in Kansas.

Clarence Duntz - Another of the three KBI assistants, Duntz is a burly man with a broad face.

Tex John Smith - Perry's father, Tex is a kindly backwoodsman who taught Perry to bake bread, but who never comes to see his son in jail. Perry's mother is Flo Buckskin, who Tex met and married on the rodeo circuit.

Susan Kidwell - Nancy's best friend, Susan lives in Holcomb.

Willie-Jay - Assistant to the chaplain of Lansing, the Kansas state prison, Willie-Jay becomes a kind of mentor to Perry. He tells Perry that he is talented.

Floyd Wells - An inmate at Lansing prison. After Perry leaves on parole, he became Dick's cellmate. He is a former employee of Herbert Clutter, and he tells Dick about the ranch and the layout of the house.

Lowell Lee Andrews - Andrews was a young college student who murdered his family. He is a schizophrenic. Several of his years on death row overlap with those of Dick and Perry. Perry resents the fact that Andrews is highly educated.

Mr. Helms - An employee of River Valley Farm.

Alfred Stoecklein - An employee of River Valley Farm. He and his wife live on the property.  
Bess Hartman - The proprietor of Hartman's Cafe. She has a thick skin and scolds her customers when they gossip too much about the Clutter murders.

Barbara Johnson - Perry's only living sister. She lives in San Francisco and is married.

Don Cullivan - An old army friend of Perry's who starts a correspondence with him upon reading about the case in the newspaper.

## **Discussion Questions**

How does Capote build suspense despite the fact that readers know the ultimate outcome from the beginning of *In Cold Blood*?

In what ways is *In Cold Blood* like a fiction novel? How does Capote report the facts and allow different voices to speak without using a journalistic style?

*In Cold Blood* starts with details about the Clutter family's last day alive. Did any of the details particularly stick out to you? Did Capote make you feel attached to the family by sharing these details?

Were there any other characters you empathized with because of small details Capote wrote about them? Bobby Rupp? Alvin Dewey?

Why do you think Capote split the narrative into three sections? Why do you think he did not describe how the murders happened until Dick and Perry were caught and gave their confessions?

Did you feel sympathy for Dick or Perry at any point?

How did Capote humanize the killers? Were you surprised by how likable they could seem despite the brutality of their crime and unremorsefulness to the end?

Capote seems to paint Perry in a more sympathetic light than Dick. He seems sensitive and even kind at points; however, by the end you find out that Perry committed all four murders. Did that surprise you? Did you sympathize with Dick more than Perry at any point? Or did you not buy any of the kind characterizations?

Do you think Dick and Perry were sane? Did the psychiatric analysis of them and descriptions of other cold blooded killers surprise you? Scare you? Make you think differently about violent crime or the death penalty?

Analyze the relationship between Dick and Perry.

How does Capote color the opening section with a sense of impending murder and doom?

Does Capote take a stand on the death penalty?

What does the crime reveal about the town of Holcomb? How does the gossip surrounding the murders reflect underlying truths about the town?

Does *In Cold Blood* have a protagonist? Is it Herb Clutter? Dewey? Perry? Explain.

Why did Capote leave out descriptions of the two older Clutter sisters? Did the narrative benefit from this exclusion?

What role does "dreaming" play in the novel, both figuratively and literally? Think of Perry's dream of the parrot and of finding gold in Mexico, and of Dewey's nightmares. How reliable is what Capote tells us about these dreams?

How is montage used in *In Cold Blood*? In other words, how does the back- and-forth description of events in Holcomb and events surrounding Dick and Perry make the novel more vivid?

In what ways does Capote reveal the nature of his research through the construction of the book? Is it important that Capote himself is never named? Does his absence endanger the credibility of the narrative? Think of the Heisenberg Principle.

Is *In Cold Blood* a creative work? Is it more than journalism? Why or why not?

### **Suggestions for further Reading (True Crime Novels +)**

Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders by Vincent Bugliosi

The Executioner's Song by Norman Mailer

Capote: A Biography by Gerald Clarke

Breakfast at Tiffany's ; Other Voices, Other Rooms AND

Music for Chameleons by Truman Capote

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey

Everything She Ever Wanted ;The Stranger Beside Me AND

Serial Murderer by Ann Rule

Party of the Century: The Fabulous Story of Truman Capote and His Black and White Ball by Deborah Davis

Portrait Of A Killer: Jack The Ripper - Case Closed by Patricia Cornwell

Green River, Running Red: The Real Story of the Green River Killer--America's Deadliest

Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov

Every Breath You Take : A True Story of Obsession, Revenge, and Murder by Ann Rule

Zodiac by Robert Graysmith

Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career by George Plimpton

The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe

The Heart is A Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers