

CAPOTE

A United Artists / Sony Picture Classics 2005 release

An A-Line Pictures / Cooper's Town Productions / Infinity Media Production

Screenplay by Dan Futterman, Directed by Bennett Miller

**Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser - Senior Psychologist, Sterkfontein Hospital,
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Philip Seymour Hoffman's Oscar winning performance as one on America's literary masters, Truman Capote, presents the viewer with more than just a story about a famous author and his craft. Two vastly opposing settings are presented in the film for the development of a rather intriguing story - one a rural Kansas farming community and the other, a 'high consumption' bohemian jet-set in Brooklyn, New York.

The film begins with the murder of a wealthy farmer and his family, the Clutters, in the winter of November 1959 in Holcomb, Kansas. Capote reads about the story of the murders in the New York Times and is instantly drawn to investigate it further. Capote and his 'assistant' and long-time friend, Harper Lee, author of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (played by Catherine Keener), leaves for Kansas by train having arranged to be 'on assignment' for the newspaper New Yorker. Initially Capote plans only to submit an article or two on the murders for the newspaper, but he is soon drawn into the story more deeply when he meets one of the two murderers, Percy Edward Smith (played by Clifton Collins Jr). Capote decides that one or two articles on the Clutter murders will not be sufficient and this eventually leads to him writing a novel, 'In Cold Blood' (1965), his best-known non-fictional work ever. The novel gives a detailed and spine-chilling account of the murders as well as providing insight into the two perpetrators' minds and motives. As Capote stated "I got this idea of doing a really serious big work - it would be precisely like a novel with a single difference: every word of it be true from beginning to end". With the writing of this novel Capote 'gave birth' to the non-fiction genre of prose.

Capote, an openly gay male in the then rather conservative and persecutory America of the late 50's early 60's is portrayed as a complex individual, narcissistic in nature and dismissive in interaction; "Truman in love with Truman" as his lover Jack Dunphy (played by Bruce Greenwood) noted of him at a party one evening in New York. Other examples of the extremities in his character were the fact that Capote would bribe people to compliment him as a writer. He would also make sure that when he found himself in the middle of an unfamiliar crowd no one was left in any doubt as to who the 'best' person in the room was by pointing out the fact that he wears expensive clothes ("this scarf is from Bergdorff's..."), knows rich and influential people, that

he travels the world and has a superior intellect and cognition ("I have a 94% recall for all conversation, I tested myself").

Though one also gets the sense that there is more to Capote than a self-centred snob. The film also highlights Capote's unstable childhood. Having abandoned him several times as a very young child, Capote's mother died when he was young and his inadequate stepfather left him in the care of his Aunts in Alabama. The character of Capote is thus portrayed filled with various insecurities, absurdities and excesses.

From a Psychoanalytical perspective it is evident that the orally fixated Truman Capote frequently employed classical compensatory behaviours and various narcissistic, immature and neurotic defence mechanisms such as projection, identification, somatisation, isolation and intellectualisation but to name a few. This Capote did to sooth a deep-rooted sense of inadequacy and fear. In the film Capote's character would oscillate between severe arrogance, rudeness and cold heartedness and sincerity, compassion and kindness. Capote develops a very strange and rather co-dependant relationship with Smith and it is this relationship that serves to be one of the main areas of focus of the film. The film vividly portrays their complex, and at times strange relationship. Between the two there is enough transference and counter transference to make one wonder as to Capote's own motives and drives behind his 'research' into the murders. Add to this a good deal of erotic tension and the wonder sets over into intrigue. Capote also had strong feelings of ambivalence and even conflictual feelings at times regarding his approach to Smith, other people and situations as portrayed in the film, verging him near the point of nervous breakdown.

"In Cold Blood", Capote's last book, is regarded by many as having had a major influence on how people wrote novels from then on, in both the fiction and non-fiction genres. Truman Capote died a lonely and isolated figure on August 25, 1984 due to complications of alcoholism not having finished his last novel "Answered Prayers" (1986). Perhaps the quote with which Capote started his last work proves to be a very poignant one indeed for a multi-faceted, gifted and complex individual: "more tears flowed due to answered questions, than due to unanswered ones" (from "Answered Prayers - The Unfinished Novel. Truman Capote. Published posthumously, Penguin Books).