

“AS GRACEFULLY AS GREEK TEMPLES”:
TRUMAN CAPOTE’S *IN COLD BLOOD* AS GREEK TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

While many scholars have linked Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* to Greek tragedy, none have performed a serious study discussing to what extent Capote's book falls under this definition. Capote's original manuscripts for *In Cold Blood* as well as his official biography indicate that it was Capote's intent to base his book upon a Greek tragic structure. This essay details how Capote uses Greek tragic conventions such as *hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*, and the chorus to imply that his nonfiction account shares many features with tragedy. The manuscripts in particular contain a wealth of information not included in Capote's final published work, which suggests that in order to create a modern day, Greek-style tragedy, Capote had to fabricate details of the story, as well as omit some information that did not fit within his narrative.

INTRODUCTION: CAPOTE AS TRAGEDIAN

After Truman Capote burst onto the literary scene in his mid-twenties with *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* in 1948, the writer enjoyed an uncommon amount of fame that lasted until his death in 1984. Throughout his boisterous life, he associated himself with New York socialites and stars of the stage and screen, and he nurtured these relationships by supplying a stage adaption of his novel, *The Grass Harp*, and a film adaptation of Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*. Above all, however, he characterized himself as a writer of fiction, though from early on he also showed great promise as a journalist.

In 1950, he published a series of travel essays called *Local Color*, followed in 1956 by a *New Yorker* piece, "The Muses are Heard," about an American theatre group staging a production of *Porgy and Bess* in the U.S.S.R. After he published a portrait of Marlon Brando in 1957 (and his life was subsequently threatened by Brando), Capote began to promise a full-length novel, *Answered Prayers*, in which he planned to depict fictionalized versions of his affluent friends and acquaintances. This unfinished novel would be published after his death. Gerald Clarke, Capote's friend and official biographer, explains the delay: Capote was simply "too restless to settle down to fiction." Clarke also records Capote telling a reporter at that time, "I like the feeling that something is happening beyond and about me and I can do nothing about it" (317). With this attitude, he began to avidly read the newspapers and, on Monday, November 16, 1959, stumbled upon a short column at the back of *The New York Times* about the brutal murder of Herbert Clutter, his wife, Bonnie, and their two teenage children, Nancy and Kenyon, in rural Kansas. This column would send him on a five-year journey to his masterpiece, *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences*.

In Cold Blood is, by definition, an act of literary journalism, but even more so Capote considered the book a “nonfiction novel” composed with the methods and style available only to one who has mastered writing fiction. While later it would be lumped with similar works like James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Lillian Ross’s profiles in the *New Yorker*, nearly all of Tom Wolfe’s work, and Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*, none of these works sparked the same sort of frenzy as did *In Cold Blood*. This frenzy was brought on partly by the success of *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1958) and its film adaptation (1961), two feats that left both those in the literary world and the public at large hungering for Capote’s next big work. Gerald Clarke said whispers of the new book started to appear in many syndicated news columns as early as 1962, recording in his official biography of Capote that “*Newsweek* had run a story, complete with a picture of the author, on ‘the overwhelmingly factual book he has been working on for more than two years’” (348).

What Capote had been working on in those two years, along with Nelle Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was conducting hundreds of interviews with people in Kansas including those closest to the murdered family, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation agents in charge of the case, and the two murderers, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock who, while Capote was researching, were apprehended, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. The results of his efforts were 4,000 pages worth of notes, which he took to Spain and later to Switzerland to weave into his tale. Though he wrote letters constantly, he made minimal public appearances after settling down abroad, and after spending nearly two years overseas, he finally returned to the U.S. after completing the first three parts of his book. The last section could not be finished until Smith and Hickock exhausted their appeals in state and federal courts.

Eagerly waiting out his ending, Capote kept in touch with Smith and Hickock on death row and corresponded with friends for another two years until, just before Christmas 1964, he gave the public its first glimpse of his new book at the Poetry Center of Manhattan's 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association. Gerald Clarke recounts the reading:

The program said he would read from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. But some, suspecting that he would surprise them with *In Cold Blood* instead, arrived with more than the usual eagerness, like movie fans hoping for the sneak preview of a long anticipated film. They were not disappointed. *Newsweek*, when sent a report, said that the effect he created was like that of "a fabulist of the old order, weaving a spell with voice and word, making one hear, see, feel, *sense*." What he shaped was a whole landscape and the fateful people in it. (352)

After delivering several more readings and attending the agonizing executions of Smith and Hickock on April 14, 1965, Capote finished the book's final section by mid-June, and its *New Yorker* release was received with a vivacity compared to the serialized release of Dickens's stories. Capote delivered all that the public had anticipated for over three years, and the result was a celebrity status that few writers enjoy.

In the wake of the book's 1966 publication stood an army of reporters eager to interview the most famous writer in America. Capote was the subject of a dozen interviews in national magazines, as well as various specials on television, radio, and in newspapers. He was on the cover of *Newsweek*, *Saturday Review*, *Book Week*, and *The New York Times Book Review* which, according to Clarke, "gave him the longest interview in its history," adding that Capote "told the tale of his nearly six-year ordeal so often that it almost became part of the national lore, like Washington's chopping down the cherry tree" (362-63).

In addition to uncovering the events of Capote's "six-year ordeal," many reporters also questioned Capote's fidelity to the facts, inquiries Capote met with a resounding statement similar to what he told George Plimpton in the *Times*—the book, he claimed, was "immaculately factual" (Plimpton 198). Later in the same interview he said, "one doesn't spend almost six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions" (207). However, his assuredness haunted him, and shortly after Philip K. Tompkins published an article entitled "In Cold Fact," in the June 1966 issue of *Esquire*, detailing several "minor distortions," Capote finally admitted to fictionalizing parts of his story.

The most notable fiction is the book's ending. K.B.I agent Alvin Dewey, full of tranquility, walks the graveyard where the Clutters are buried and has a chance meeting with Sue Kidwell, Nancy Clutter's best friend. There, they have an almost clichéd conversation about life's continuation even after a terrible tragedy, until Sue bounds away, "a pretty girl in a hurry" and Dewey starts home "toward the trees, and under them, leaving behind him the big sky, the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat" (343). According to Clarke, it was Capote's custom to dwell on his ending, and, while many critics still praised the book, they admitted the ending was "trite and sentimental" (359). Capote himself said he could have done without the ending, but he felt that he had to "return to the town, to bring everything back full circle, to end in peace" (359). After he released this information, attention to the matter died down.

During Capote's lifetime, only Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (1978), Jack De Bellis's 1979 article "Visions and Revisions," and Ronald Weber's *The Literature of Fact* (1980) make any further mention of Capote's fictions. Zavarzadeh and Weber are concerned more with the nonfiction novel form than with Capote's work itself, whereas De Bellis highlights some 5,000 minor changes—

commas, diction, etc.—that were made between *In Cold Blood*'s serialized *New Yorker* release and its first Random House edition.

All of this scholarly work comprises much of what was written about Capote's book before his death in 1984 and built upon the work of researchers, like Tompkins, who interviewed those Capote had written about in *In Cold Blood* as well as interviews featuring Capote discussing his composition methods. After his death, Capote's estate generously gave his manuscripts to the New York Public Library. However, despite the availability of this primary source, scholars writing about his fictions did not consult them for new material, likely because of the number of articles that had been written about the book before the manuscripts were made public. Robert Augustin Smart's *The Nonfiction Novel* (1985), Phyllis Frus McCord's "The Ideology of Form: The Nonfiction Novel" (1986), and Eric Heyne's "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction" (1987) are but three examples of scholarly work produced after the manuscripts were made available that do not include specific references to its content. Later work describing Capote's fictions, such as the very recent "The Case Against Faction" (2008) by Oliver Conolly and Haydar Bashshar, does not mention any previous journalistic coverage detailing fictions in Capote's work, or the manuscripts. In fact, there is no indication that anyone, save Clarke for his biographical work, has ever consulted Capote's archive for any other serious reason, let alone to shed new light on *In Cold Blood*.

Study of the manuscripts reveals that Capote was selective in his alterations of fact, either choosing, or in some cases inventing, those details that adhered to his narrative vision. Capote's narrative vision is a factor that never plays into scholars' arguments, as the goal for much of the published work discussing Capote's departure from truth is only concerned with fictions being present in a nonfiction work, a debate interesting in itself for its impact on the

future of literary journalism, but short sighted in terms of the present discussion. Since scholars have not attempted to define his narrative vision, this essay will do so, and while fictionalizations are not discussed in detail in this essay, it is proposed that Capote fictionalizes some events in order to properly deliver the story he envisioned.

Though scholars have not seriously addressed it, exactly what Capote had in mind is the subject of little debate—a modern day, nonfiction, American version of Greek tragedy. In his official biography of the author, Clarke recalls that while Capote sat pondering the book’s form in Spain, he realized that it had become much more than a simple true crime story: “It was a tale of a good and virtuous family being pursued and destroyed by forces beyond its knowledge or control. It was a theme that reverberated like Greek tragedy, a story that Aeschylus or Sophocles might have turned into a drama of destiny and fate” (331). Indeed, on the first page of *In Cold Blood*, Capote takes a cue from *Homecoming*, the first part of Eugene O’Neill’s American tragedy trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*, likening a white cluster of Holcomb, Kansas, grain elevators to Greek temples. In his play, O’Neill uses Greek columns to transport the essence of Greece to 1865 New England, whereas Capote uses the more suitable grain elevators peppering the rural Kansas landscape. Two pages later, he again mentions the grain elevators and follows with a comment that “drama, in the form of exceptional happenings, had never happened [in Holcomb]” (5). In this way, Capote tells his audience that drama is about to occur, and it is safe to say that he has Greek drama in mind. In order for him to create a modern day American tragedy like O’Neill’s, he selected from his notes only the facts that conveyed the story he wished to tell while weaving in several key elements from Greek tragedy—*hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*, and a chorus.

These elements, along with a few others, are the standard conventions found in the extant Greek tragedies, and described in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle's example, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, will be used to set the stage for a discussion of Capote's reliance upon Greek tragedy to structure his take on American life not only because it is perhaps the most well known example of Greek tragedy, but also because the elements of tragedy Capote uses in his book are the most pronounced in this particular play.

Sophocles quickly sets his plot in motion by introducing Theban citizens who are concerned about their ailing city, and they look to Oedipus, their king, to return the city to its former glory. Oedipus calls upon Tiresias, a blind prophet, to help him solve the problem, which he has learned has been caused by the presence of the murderer of the previous king, Laius. When Tiresias hints that he is the problem, and, by extension, Laius' murderer, Oedipus loses his temper. There is a hint of Oedipus' tragic flaw in this interaction, his tendency to work himself into an unprovoked and irrational anger, the same fatal flaw that led to his *hamartia*. As Tiresias says to him, "You criticize my temper...unaware of the one *you* live with" (178). It is this lack of awareness Tiresias speaks of that highlights the true meaning of *hamartia*, a figurative kind of blindness that causes an error in judgment. When Oedipus reveals the details of the murder later in the play to his wife, Jocasta, it is understood that, due to this flaw, he lost his temper and killed Laius along with the rest of his party, except an old shepherd, simply because he was forced off the road.

While describing this murder, Oedipus starts to piece together his guilt, and the ingredients for the *anagnorisis*—a recognition that accounts for a character's passage from ignorance into knowledge—start to appear. Oedipus, as a result of his conversation with Tiresias and Jocasta, is beginning to pass from ignorance into knowledge, though he cannot fully accept

his responsibility for his actions, and it takes Oedipus losing his temper with the shepherd, the sole survivor of Oedipus' attack on Laius' party, for the *anagnorisis* to fully occur. When the shepherd reveals that Oedipus fulfilled a much-feared prophecy by killing Laius, his father, and by marrying his mother, Oedipus not only finally recognizes it as truth, but he also accepts his guilt and newfound position. He yells, "I stand revealed at last-- / cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage, / cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands!" (232). With his role effectively reversed and guilt accepted, he runs into the palace screaming. The events that occur inside the palace—Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus blinding himself with pins from her clothes—are then narrated before Oedipus reemerges with blood streaming from his eyes.

Sophocles' chorus of Thebans is dynamic in the play, sometimes offering advice, sometimes expressing concern for Oedipus and for their city. Overall, however, Sophocles uses the chorus to accent the general emotional state of the play. The chorus's reaction to Oedipus' reemergence is one such instance. When they proclaim, "O the terror— / the suffering, for all the world to see, / the worst terror that ever met my eyes," they share their collective emotions which Sophocles uses to highlight his climax. They also mention their role as onlookers, a role they share with the audience. By hinting at this similarity between the world of the play and the world of the audience, Sophocles almost bridges the gap between the two, which is important, for the chorus also stresses suffering in the passage, which hints at Aristotle's much debated convention of *catharsis*.

The most popular definition for *catharsis* is a purification resulting from the purging of pity and fear that occurs from witnessing suffering in a tragedy. Though Oedipus is flawed, the audience is made to sympathize with him due to the amount of suffering he goes through. Sophocles addresses this head-on when his chorus states that they have never seen suffering so

terrible. By witnessing Oedipus' suffering firsthand, the chorus goes through their own form of *catharsis* and, due to their kinship with the audience, effectively reflects the audience's emotional response back at them before the play draws to an appropriate conclusion where the chorus will continue to "watch and wait the final day" until Oedipus dies, "free of pain at last" (251).

Capote draws upon these aspects of tragedy under far different circumstances by using a different medium, and he attempts to please a crowd far removed from Athenian theatergoers casting stone ballots as votes for the most supreme tragedy; however, there is still much his book has in common with the genre. The specific flaws that produce the *hamartia* (the error in judgment that sets into motion a character's downfall) for the novel's main characters is a very important part of the book; it sets the plot moving forward. Capote hints that he has *hamartia* in mind specifically by alluding to its etymology through the use of many sight references. Like Sophocles, by including both *hamartia* and these sight references, he intends to echo the flaws of the killers as resulting from a metaphorical blindness. *Hamartia* and tragic flaws are the starting points for this discussion, for they act as a gauge to determine to what degree Capote's text includes the key elements of tragedy. For example, on one hand, Capote's antagonists—Smith and Hickock—possess tragic flaws; however, on the other hand, it is difficult to blame them for these flaws due to their innate problems. Similarly, the text contains two *anagnorisis* passages, one each for Smith and Hickock after they recognize they have been apprehended for their terrible crime. However, the *anagnorisis* passage in traditional tragedy is accompanied by *peripeteia* ("reversal"), which Capote removed since Smith and Hickock did not have a life to be reversed—Oedipus was a king, they were already convicted criminals. Capote's heroes, like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, start low and go lower. The text also

works to produce *catharsis* in its readers, though Capote, after recording the terrible climax that would have ended a typical tragedy, fictionalized the dénouement to end his book in peace; thus, the two primary emotions involved in the *catharsis*, pity and fear, are replaced with more positive, hopeful emotions.

Studying the points of the text that are similar to Greek tragedy provides a context to examine the contents of Capote's manuscripts, as the form seems to be one of the main factors that shaped *In Cold Blood* and helped the author determine which details from his manuscripts to include, which to change, and which to invent altogether.

HAMARTIA: THE LANGUAGE OF SIGHT

According to the *Oxford Greek-English Lexicon*, the word *hamartia* stems from the Ancient Greek *ἁμαρτάνω* (*hamartano*), the earliest recorded use of which is Homer's *Odyssey* in reference to Polyphemus' blindness as well as Telemachus' error in leaving the storeroom door open allowing the suitors to steal spears and armor. Both of these meanings consist of an oversight or lack of proper judgment that produces a negative result. Though it has had many such meanings, its most popular was something like "missing the mark" when shooting an arrow or throwing a spear. Adopting this particular meaning, Aristotle in the *Poetics* says that a protagonist must pass from good to bad fortune not as a result of vice, "but of some great error or frailty" (23) where, for error, he uses *ἁμαρτίαν* (*hamartian*). Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet go even further in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, mentioning that *hamartia* itself is a "mental sickness, the criminal who is prey to madness, a man who has lost his senses," whereas the term *hamartanein* means "to make a mistake in the strongest sense of an error of the intelligence, a blindness that entails failure" (62). This meaning of *hamartanein* is very similar to J. M. Bremer's definition of *hamartia*, which she takes directly from Aristotle: *hamartia* is a harmful act performed "through ignorance of the circumstances (object, place, instrument etc.);" yet, though the act may be performed through ignorance, the person committing the act is still to blame (17). The common link in these definitions, as Tiresias points out to Oedipus, is lack of awareness. Essentially, *hamartia* occurs as a result of a flaw that rests unseen somewhere in the mind (or in some tragedies, the bloodline) that causes a fall.

Aristotle spoke of *hamartia* as more of a plot convention rather than a principle of character. This complicates arguments, for *hamartia* can never specifically refer to something

inherent in a character; however it can be described as the specific place in the plot where a flaw causes the downfall of the character. To avoid confusion, due to *In Cold Blood's* overwhelming number of references to sight, vision, blindness, etc., *hamartia* as discussed in this essay, while informed by all of the above conceptions, is simply the murder itself, for it was Smith and Hickock's tragic flaws, which are related to a metaphorical blindness, that produce this crime and the characters' downfalls.

The beginning of the first Random House edition contains, according to George Garrett's article "Then and Now: *In Cold Blood* Revisited," in addition to the usual acknowledgements, copyright material, and epigraph, "a chilling illustration, [...] two pairs of eyes, an extreme close shot in black and white, the eyes of the killers, here brooding over the story to follow" (468).

The meaning of this inclusion is clear when one reads David Guest's chapter on *In Cold Blood* in his book *Sentenced to Death: The American Novel and Capital Punishment*. Guest writes, "Smith and Hickock are placed in a sort of panopticon, while the all-seeing narrator sits, himself unseen, in the observation tower" (113). Expounding on this issue, Trenton Hickman remarks,

Once contained in a novelistic structure reminiscent of Foucault's reiteration of Bentham's panopticon, Capote's characters are forced into a spectacle that offers readers of the book vicarious participation in the slaughter of an entire family from Kansas. In Capote's view, this strategy offers not only an angle into the criminal mind but a *catharsis* for an audience that can vent its own destructive energies through interaction with his novel rather than through violent action in the community. (465)

Capote's inclusion of the eye illustrations adds an additional Greek element (on top of Hickman's *catharsis*) to these authors' views of the book as a structured reality created by

Capote that imprisons its characters. As the book moves further along, and especially in its final section when Smith and Hickock are actually in prison, Capote's panoptic presence above the text's actions becomes more apparent. However, in the first section, "The Last to See Them Alive," while the panoptic theme is certainly present, he is primarily concerned with what his characters see, which the illustration signifies. Capote is obviously fixated on sight images, for on average, there is at least one reference per two pages. (See Appendix A for a selective list of significant sight references in Capote's first section.) Apart from their allusion to the frequent sight references in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and echo of the conventions for *hamartia*, these references also play on Smith's belief that some other force has previously determined the events in his life; for example, he is a serious believer in fate.

Fate serves as a motivating force for Smith, as it does for characters in Greek tragedy. Many of the actions in *Oedipus Tyrannus* are motivated by fate, and the fear of bad prophecies and negative treatment by the gods is always on the characters' minds. Oedipus flees Corinth to avoid his fate, but whereas Oedipus seeks to avoid his fate, Smith, in *In Cold Blood*, believed his purpose for being in Kansas was "not because he wished to be but because fate had arranged the matter" (42). Smith determines that fate led him to Kansas to be with his friend, whom he only refers to as Willie-Jay, the assistant to the prison chaplain, whom he had met and admired while at Lansing. It was much more than chance to Smith that Hickock had invited him to rob the Clutter house. It was actually Smith's intention to meet up with Willie-Jay, not to join Hickock, but "if things didn't 'work out with Willie-Jay,' then he might 'consider Dick's proposition'" (45). For Smith, his actions have little to do with his decisions—he believes there are larger things affecting him. When a rubber glove tears while he is putting it on, it is not a simple inconvenience, it "seem[s] to him an omen" (53). Though these kinds of interpretations are an

innate feature of Smith's character, a letter written by Willie-Jay details how Smith's actions do affect Smith: "You are strong, but there is a flaw in your strength, and unless you learn to control it, the flaw will prove stronger than your strength and defeat you. The flaw? *Explosive emotional reaction out of all proportion to the occasion*" (author's emphasis) (43).

This flaw is certainly reminiscent of Oedipus', whom Tiresias, the old blind prophet, informs is unaware of his temper. Willie-Jay fulfills a similar role in Capote's text; for Smith, Willie-Jay "had grown 10 feet tall, a gray-haired wise man haunting the hallways of his mind" (43). Once Capote uses the prophetic figure to explain Smith's flaw, the reader can thus interpret the murder as resulting from this flaw. By choosing to emphasize these particular details about Smith's actions and character, Capote sets him up as a kind of tragic hero, a man who sees himself chained to his fate, and who possesses a serious flaw that leads to his own downfall. Capote personally told Clarke that from the very beginning he envisioned the story as "a tale of a good and virtuous family being pursued and destroyed by forces beyond its knowledge or control. It was a theme that reverberated like Greek tragedy, a story that Aeschylus or Sophocles might have turned into a drama of destiny and fate" (331). Once Capote creates this similarity in the text by linking it to Greek tragedy, he had to find the similarities his characters shared with the heroes of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides, thereby, as Hickman opines, imprisoning his true life subjects in a tragic narrative framework.

This metaphorical "prison," in which Capote places so much stress on the eyes and the act of observation, arguably, is most concerned, at least early in the text, in demonstrating *hamartia*, a word defined as "unseeing." It is plausible, due to all of the eye references and the careful inclusion of a specific flaw for each of his main characters—Smith: explosive emotional reaction; Hickock: envy for those who possess more than himself—that Capote took the concept

of *hamartia* and chose the specific instances in his manuscripts where *hamartia* could be added to the story he envisioned. With the obvious roles already laid before him, he had to create characters that were similar to Greek tragic heroes, and similarly, create the characters that his heroes destroyed, innocent victims like Laius in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Iphigenia in *Agamemnon*.

As Clarke mentions in his biography of Capote, the Clutters were a virtuous family, and they had to be for the story to be worth telling; as J.M Bremer quotes from Aristotle's *Poetics*, "No vicious people should come to disaster, it serves them right: there is no reason for grief then; [...] neither is there any occasion for terror: the criminal is in no way like ourselves" (9). Similarly, those that cause them disaster cannot be "honourable and noble people, who deserve to be taken seriously" because if this were the case, everyone would suffer, none of whom deserve it. Since the innocence of the Clutters and the *hamartia* of the killers was so crucial to Capote's text, he carefully chose details about Mr. Clutter that would make him seem an innocent and virtuous man.

While much of Mr. Clutter's characterization is certainly true—he is a capable farmer and a loving father with the right amount of leniency and strictness, chairman of the Kansas Conference of Farm Organizations, member of the Federal Farm Credit Board under president Eisenhower, etc.—Capote does not characterize Mr. Clutter as many members of the town saw him. When Capote interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Lester McCoy on December 27, 1959, Mrs. McCoy remarked, "Outside of a certain circle, the Methodist clique, I don't think too many grieved over Herb Clutter. He was a self-centered man with a strong power drive; he did a lot of things, but not much that didn't help Herb Clutter. [...] Mrs. Clutter was just a quiet thing completely dominated by him" (Capote, December 27). Also, while Capote portrays Mr. Clutter

as certainly not the richest farmer in Holcomb, he does say that the Clutters are well off. In the manuscripts, Al Dewey remarks that Clutter had “‘spread himself a little thin’ and was drawing in his horns. Had recently sold a portion of his land” (Capote, Alvin Dewey). Lastly, while many of the Clutter acquaintances sympathized with Mrs. Clutter’s “condition,” an ambiguous depression causing physical ailments from which she had suffered terribly following the birth of her children, others interpreted Mr. Clutter’s constant need for perfection as a main contributor to this sickness and noted that she was constantly troubled about whether or not she disappointed someone or put someone out. Mrs. Stringer, Nancy’s Home Economics instructor, suggested that Mrs. Clutter’s condition was a result of her husband’s inherent misogyny: “‘He was the kind of man who thought women were women...’ and not to be paid attention to otherwise: Belonged in some sub-class; should have been happy in their domestic lives; should have lived for their men & children” (Capote, Stringer). Nelle Harper Lee remarks in her notes that Mrs. Clutter reportedly showed “no indication that she was successful as a wife, a lover, a mother, a homemaker; or that she was successful as an effective personality in her own right or as Clutter’s helpmate,” adding on the next page that “[Mr. Clutter] had his fun on the side, and Bonnie probably knew it” (Lee, December 18).

Had Capote included these negative comments in the book, they would have vastly changed its trajectory, potentially negating Mr. Clutter’s status as an “honourable and noble” person who deserves “to be taken seriously.” As a result, Capote was forced to omit these notes in order to keep Mr. Clutter the innocent patriarch Capote needed him to be for his book to be effective, while keeping just enough of its detail (Mr. Clutter’s self righteousness for example) to suggest that his story, while sharing certain elements with Greek tragedy, has its own individuality.

Like Mr. Clutter, Smith required reshaping to fulfill his role. Mr. Clutter appears much more negatively in Capote's manuscripts than in the text, whereas Smith, had Capote included certain details about him, would have become a sympathetic man. In the text he is characterized as dark and contradictory—Clarke places him alongside literary darklings such as Roger Chillingworth in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd: Sailor*, and Flem Snopes in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga (326). When interviewed in the book, Smith's own sister, Barbara Johnson, says that she is afraid of him, and always has been, "He can *seem* so warmhearted and sympathetic. Gentle. He cries so easily. Sometimes music sets him off, and when he was a little boy he used to cry because he thought a sunset was beautiful. Or the moon. Oh, he can fool you. He can make you feel so sorry for him" (182). Though these confessions point to Smith's sinister nature, Capote records Johnson's concern about her possessing the same nature; she worries whether or not she shares with Smith and her siblings a certain terrible "destiny" (183). Since Capote chose to relate details that set Smith up as a tragic hero, belief in fate, a possible terrible destiny, plus several references to his many abilities (guitar, voice, handwriting, etc.), vocabulary, and physique (apart from his deformed legs), he had to omit other details from his manuscripts, including more from this same interview with Barbara Johnson, that make Smith seem so damaged, so thoroughly disconnected from reality, that had he included them, Smith would have garnered too much sympathy and pity to fulfill the role that Capote intended for him.

Smith himself, unlike Hickock, believes that there is something wrong with him for being able to successfully kill the Clutters. In the book, Capote records Smith thinking, "It was 'painful' to imagine that one might be 'not just right'—particularly if whatever was wrong was not your own fault but 'maybe a thing you were born with'" (110). Indeed, Smith's sister gives

some insight to his criminal tendencies at an early age, saying that he was “a wild thing, a thief, a robber. His first recorded arrest was on October 27, 1936—his eighth birthday” (184). Had Dr. W. Mitchell Jones, the court appointed psychiatrist who assessed the two criminals before their trial, been able to testify on Smith’s behalf, he would have agreed that such an early onset of symptoms provides more than enough evidence to support the conclusion that Smith possessed “definite signs of severe mental illness” (296). Vernant and Vidal-Naquet’s definition of *hamartia* includes such an illness, for they propose that the word indicates a “mental sickness, the criminal who is prey to madness, a man who has lost his senses” (62). Both Dr. Jones and Willie-Jay’s letters show that Smith was subject to rages that sound exactly like Vernant and Vidal-Naquet’s definition. Dr. Jones in particular says that “Both [Smith] and his acquaintances have been aware of these rages, which he says ‘mount up’ in him, and of the poor control he has over them. [...] The inappropriate force of his anger and lack of ability to control or channel it reflect a primary weakness of personality structure” (297). If rage is what causes Smith to murder the Clutters, then he is certainly to blame, and, according to J.M. Bremer, “culpable passion or inclination” is a direct cause of *hamartia* (61). However, Smith’s lack of control over these rages, as well as several omitted details from the interview with Perry’s sister in Capote’s manuscripts, point to Smith not being entirely responsible for the Clutter murders, and thus portray him as a victim of a narrow-minded judicial system.

During the interview with Barbara Johnson, Capote learned several disturbing facts about Smith’s early life. Capote relates that in his conversation with Mrs. Johnson “she told [him] that Perry had once tried to rape their older sister Fern” (Capote, *Santa Fe Super Chief*, 2). Later, Mrs. Johnson says of Smith: “I remember once when we were real little, I guess Perry couldn’t have been more than five, we were playing in a lumber yard, and I saw Perry with a pack of

matches trying to set the place on fire. He was always playing with matches...trying to set things on fire. And stealing. He'd steal anything he could get his hands on" (Capote, *Santa Fe Super Chief*, 5). Capote purposefully omitted these details from his narrative, since he includes others from the same interview in his text, for had he included them, Smith would have seemed like he was a product of bad genes and a poor upbringing and therefore not responsible at all for killing the Clutters and did, without a doubt, possess a severe mental illness, an innate problem rendering him incapable of controlling the rages of which he is certainly aware. While this illness exemplifies a type of blindness, for he could not see clearly as a result, it is not the particular sort that indicates a fatal flaw, for he cannot take responsibility, as Oedipus does, for his actions. Capote chooses not to include these details and instead merely hints at Smith's behavior, as well as Smith's fixation with fate and Mrs. Johnson's idea that the family is destined for the terrible. Had Capote included the elements from the Johnson interview that reveal Smith as a victim, his book would not have hinted at Smith's tragic role in the story, and instead been wholly reliant on readers sympathizing with Smith's condition and his inability to plead insanity in Kansas court.

On the other hand, there is evidence from the manuscripts to support Hickock as a culpable tragic hero with the proper lack of awareness. Unlike Smith, Hickock thinks of himself as a well-rounded, regular person: "I'm a normal," he says in the text, before Capote continues: "Dick meant what he said. He thought himself as balanced, as sane as anyone—maybe a bit smarter than the average fellow, that's all" (108). However, Hickock's conception of himself as "normal" after planning and carrying out such a terrible crime is the very thing that causes one to question his ability to see clearly. The way Capote characterizes Hickock in the book suggests that he may not be totally responsible for his actions because his behavior and demeanor changed following an automobile accident; if this was true, Hickock could be placed in the same category

as Smith—that is, mentally off balance to the point where he is incapable of controlling his actions.

In the book, Hickock’s father blames Hickock’s criminal tendencies on the car accident: "I still think the reason he started doing stunts such as that was connected with the smash-up. Concussed his head in a car smash-up. After that, he wasn't the same boy. Gambling, writing bad checks. I never knew him to do them things before" (166). This “smash-up” happened in 1950. According to Dr. Jones, Hickock suffered “a serious head injury with concussion and several hours of unconsciousness.” Following this unfortunate event were “blackout spells, periods of amnesia, and headaches [...] and a major portion of his antisocial behavior ha[d] occurred since that time” (294). Adding to this discussion, Cheryl Koski in “The Nonfiction Novel as Psychiatric Casebook: Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*” provides an entire psychiatric evaluation detailing Hickock’s psychopathy according to Hervey Cleckley’s 16 points of diagnostic criteria. According to Koski, Hickock is unreliable, dishonest, insincere, and possesses a lack of remorse, poor judgment, egocentricity, and an inability to love; these traits and many more are commonly found in clinical psychopaths across the board. But one cannot place blame on Hickock for these behaviors and the murders, for, if we take Hickock’s and his father’s word for it, these kinds of behaviors manifested after his car accident, which makes him less easily blamed, and culpability is a requirement for *hamartia*.

Another side of this argument is that the behavior Hickock picked up in prison led to the Clutters’ demise. The headline from a newspaper clipping in Capote’s manuscripts from the January 6, 1960 edition of the *Hutchinson News*, reads “Father Blames Hickock’s Troubles on Prison Life.” In this article, Mr. Hickock does not mention the car accident at all, choosing instead to blame the prison for Hickock’s transformation: “Prison ruined that boy. [...] It really

did. You could sure tell the difference in him when he came back.” In the same box of manuscript notes, Lee reiterates this information: “Mr. Hickock said his son was a good boy until he went to prison, that the idea, ‘he’d steal anything he could get his hands on’ was a myth until Dick served time. Then ‘something happened to him,’ he was a changed man” (Lee, January 8). While Capote does use Hickock’s father’s statement about prison changing his boy’s life, it does nothing to weaken his portrayal of Hickock as a character who was changed, through no fault of his own, by the car accident, since the accident occurred in 1950, long before his stretch at Lansing Prison in 1958-1959.

The true side of Hickock’s involvement—apart from the fact that Hickock did suffer through a car crash with terrible pain manifesting thenceforth, and served time in prison wherein he made friends that negatively impacted him—is that Hickock had always been a small-time troublemaker, and the car accident and prison time provided him a way to avoid taking responsibility for his actions and, in fact, might have made them more severe since he had something to blame other than himself. Clarke records that Capote felt he had found a small town kid, “a braggart, consumed with envy of all those who had had it easier” (324-25). Indeed, in *In Cold Blood*, Hickock’s father expresses that Hickock had wished “to go to college. Study to be an engineer. But we couldn’t do it. Plain didn’t have the money. Never have had any money” (166). Hickock’s earliest escapades seem to be a reaction to this fiscal situation. As a boy, Hickock had grown envious of another boy’s seashell collection and, as a result, he had “stolen the shells and one by one crushed them with a hammer. Envy was constantly with him; the Enemy was anyone who was someone he wanted to be or who had anything he wanted to have” (200). Capote uses Hickock’s envy as Tiresias uses Oedipus’ temper, for allegedly it was this single moral hiccup that sent him to Lansing for writing bad checks and also sent him to the

Clutter home. With this link between tragedy and his book made, it is curious why Capote chose to eliminate several details from his manuscripts about Hickock's early life that would have reinforced his assessment of Hickock's character.

Hickock was born June 6, 1931, and the car accident happened in 1950, making him 19 at the time. In Lee's notes, she paraphrases the words of Hickock's high school principal: "He was a low-average student and frequently in trouble with school authorities. Had been 'kicked out' several times." Also, Lee asserts, "Edgerton [Hickock's home town] rumor has it that the Hickock sons were always in trouble and the reason for it was no home discipline" (Lee, January 8). Indeed, in Capote's early handwritten outline, he intended to mention that Hickock's brother Walter had also "been in a little trouble—arrested for grand larceny in 1958" (Capote, Outline). Capote gives no indication that Hickock was in trouble constantly as a boy, other than the seashell incident for which he records no ramifications, for if he had, he would not have been able to place any amount of blame on the car crash and jail time, and would have been left describing the crime as a result of an innate problem and a poor upbringing, developing Hickock in much the same way as Smith. Capote made the authorial decision to exclude these aspects of Hickock's character in order to fashion him into a character who shared particular features with Greek tragic heroes. He was hot-headed and intelligent with a very specific flaw—envy—but, departing from the tragic conventions, a car crash and prison life could have led him to these characteristics, allowing Capote to fashion not a tragic character per se, but a nonfiction character with tragic qualities.

What this *hamartia* discussion indicates is that Capote made choices about what aspects of his characters and their lives to include in his narrative. These three characters, Mr. Clutter, Smith, and Hickock, appear differently in the text than from the manuscripts. In Capote's notes,

Mr. Clutter comes across as a misogynistic, tyrannical husband, Smith as a psychotic and deranged man, and Hickock as a small town troublemaker with no home discipline. Since Capote mentions the “Greek temples” at the beginning of the book, saturates his text in eye imagery like Sophocles, records several instances where Smith believes his actions are fated, and calls attention to the killers’ specific flaws as a way to play with the concept of *hamartia*, it is highly probable that he chose to omit some of the more extreme aspects of the aforementioned characters in order to make his book and its characters have a distinct tragic flavor.

ANAGNORISIS: SOUND AND SILENCE

Capote suggests that his book's main characters share specific qualities with classical tragic heroes by including not only character traits, but also certain key plot conventions. In order for a tragic hero to completely fulfill the role of a tragic hero, he must recognize his wrongdoing, undergo a complete change in fortune, and ultimately accept responsibility for his actions. In Capote's third section, "Answer," there are two such recognitions, which set into motion Smith and Hickock's change in fortune and finally acceptance of their fate. Indeed, once the two men hear the name "Clutter" spoken after being apprehended under what they thought were "hot check" charges, they both go through visual changes, signifiers that show Smith and Hickock are discovering the true reason they were arrested. Aristotle calls this ἀναγνώρισις (*anagnorisis*), which is often translated as "recognition" but, more literally, means "backward knowing," a word antonymic to prognostication. Aristotle says that this kind of "recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" (21). *Anagnorisis* is typically accompanied by περιπέτεια (*peripeteia*), which is usually translated as "reversal." Aristotle mentions that, in the best tragedies, *peripeteia* occurs coincident with *anagnorisis*, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Oedipus recognizes the truth and immediately his fortune changes. While Capote ensures that his text does include these recognition scenes which are very similar to Oedipus' *anagnorisis*, he cannot include *peripeteia*, for Smith and Hickock have no fortune to be reversed.

What is most important to the larger discussion in this essay is the fact that in both *In Cold Blood* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *anagnorisis* occurs as a result of words that are

spoken. The lines from *Oedipus Tyrannus* are oft quoted. Oedipus, dangerously close to realizing his true identity, seeks out the shepherd who had taken care of him before giving him to the childless king of Corinth, Polybus. The shepherd begs Oedipus not to make him reveal the truth, but Oedipus threatens him with torture and then death. Finally, out of options, the shepherd cries, “Oh no, I’m right at the edge, the horrible truth—I’ve got to say it!” to which Oedipus remarks, “And I’m at the edge of hearing horrors, yes, but I must hear!” (230). Finally, after Oedipus’ identity is revealed to him, he exclaims, “I stand revealed at last—cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage, cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands! (232). Oedipus’ revelation is the *anagnorisis* passage, and it occurs as a result, not of some action, but of spoken words.

Similarly, in Capote’s text, the revelation for Smith and Hickock comes as two separate speech-acts, or instances where words are spoken aloud. The confident murderers, believing they are being questioned about their petty crimes in Kansas, cooperate until they hear the name “Clutter” spoken. When the K.B.I. agents mention the murders in the Las Vegas interrogation room, Hickock ““under[goes] an intense visible reaction. He turn[s] gray. His eyes twitch”” (223). Smith has a somewhat different reaction, he “swallow[s]. He beg[ins] to rub his knees” (225). In the manuscripts, Dewey claims that Smith’s face, like Hickock’s, turned color. In the book and the manuscripts, Smith follows his immediate reaction with silence, in which Dewey exults, “for an innocent man would ask who was this witness, and who were these Clutters, and why did they think he’d murdered them—would, at any rate, say *something*. But Smith sat quiet, squeezing his knees” (226). Faced with his violent act that he has been forced to remember, Smith falls silent.

The plot of Capote's book is pushed forward by the act of speaking; it is a very vocal text. Capote's reliance on the recorded interrogation and confession as well as court testimony and the words of his interviewees make the act of speaking (as opposed to narrated action) the most powerful force in the book. Peter Burian claims in "Myth and *muthos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot," that "Discourse, verbal interaction, *is* the essential action, not a mere reference to or representation of the action. The issues of tragedy, lodged as they may be in political, moral, and/or personal conflicts, are enacted through speech-acts" (201). Violence occurring in a classical tragedy would take place offstage and then be reported by a messenger or herald, with only a few exceptions—Prometheus' suffering in *Prometheus Bound* and Creon's abduction of Antigone in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and a few others. According to Burian, this is a "convention that has often been interpreted as a matter of decorum, but more likely stems from the realization that, within the conventions of the fifth-century theatre, such things can be made far more vivid through narration than through stage production" (199). Burian uses the critical *anagnorisis* scene of *Oedipus Tyrannus* to illustrate his point, suggesting that, apart from including violence that only occurs offstage in Oedipus' palace (Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding), Sophocles intends to place particular importance on the speech-act, for in a brief twenty-four-line exchange between Oedipus and the shepherd there are twenty-eight references to speech-acts. Burian recreates the *anagnorisis* scene placing emphasis on each act of speech, of which the following is but a small example:

The old shepherd, realizing that the garrulous messenger from Corinth may inadvertently reveal the awful secret of Oedipus' origins, *orders* him to be silent. Oedipus *countermans* his order and *threatens* punishment. The shepherd

asks how he has erred, and Oedipus *reproaches* him for *refusing to tell* about the child of which the messenger has *spoken* (200, Burian's emphasis).

While adjusting for the lack of innovation in an ancient Greek theater does not place any limitations on Capote's narrative, he still chooses similar methods and places the same importance on the act of speech.

Though Capote was confined to the spoken word to provide his *anagnorisis* scenes since they occurred as the result of a single interview conducted with each murderer, he did not have this same confinement for the details of the murders themselves. He heard dozens of versions, plenty to interpret what had happened and narrate the crime; however, out of all of his options, he chose not to show the Clutter murders in a scene, and in fact, earlier in the book, he cuts off a scene where he would have narrated it. Instead, he chose Smith's version of the murder. Such a choice is curious, and there are several possible explanations for using Smith's words. Smith is certainly the more interesting of the murderers, and what Capote chose to recreate about his character points more directly to the book's tragic elements, which may account for it. Overall, the similarity *In Cold Blood* shares with tragedy in its depiction of action only through speech may simply be a result of Capote's journalistic methods, but due to Capote's obvious allusions to tragedy elsewhere in the book it is plausible that Capote's choice to use speech so prominently was to make his book similar to a tragedy.

There are 464 speech acts, counting dialog tags, within the section, "Answer," not including its title, since, according to the OED, an answer, along with being spoken, could also be "written or otherwise given." As many as 19 acts of speech appear on a single page, page 238. Page number 237 contains 17, and page number 239 contains another 14. This is a total of 50 references to speech in the three consecutive pages (237-39) where Smith describes the

Clutter murders. The surge of speech references during this particular part of the text reinforces Capote's choice to take the tragic route and show violence through speech rather than narration.

This narrative choice brings up a glaring question that complicates this argument. Since this discussion is comparing two different mediums, the play and the "novel," it is understood that there will be some fundamental differences in narrative technique. The novelist is afforded relatively unlimited powers of description whereas the classical playwright included hardly any at all, instead relying on monologue, dialogue, and choral arrangements to describe setting and particularly harrowing details. The Greek tragedians in particular used messengers and heralds to report gruesome detail, for example when the messenger reports Oedipus' self-blinding, whereas Renaissance tragedians, Shakespeare in his early days, Middleton, Kyd, and others, chose to show terrible acts of violence onstage. While the two mediums being compared in this essay are disparate, it does not change the fact that Capote drew upon particular characteristics from classical tragedy rather than Renaissance tragedy, using characters to retell the terrible scenes rather than describing them himself, in a work he fashions with clear allusions to Greek tragedy. This narrative device of letting his characters speak about violence rather than using his powers of narration to describe them does not itself make *In Cold Blood* a tragedy, but instead gives the book another tragic element and provides further evidence that it was Greek tragedy Capote wished to invoke, not recreate.

Words and the act of speech have the most significant role in Capote's text, but silence, as the opposite, takes on an interesting role as well. Chris Anderson discusses the role of silence in "Truman Capote: A Ceremony of Style." He claims that the book shows the "disintegration of language and meaning in the face of violence" (54). To him, violence silences—as it did for Smith in the interrogation room—and occurs when words fail. Anderson cites Mr. Clutter's

inability to dissuade Smith and Hickock as an example: “‘You couldn’t argue with him,’ Perry says of Dick, ‘he was so excited.’ When Mr. Clutter tries to calm Dick down, Dick shouts: ‘Shut up! When we want you to talk, we’ll tell you.’ Violence takes place after the failure of language. It is fundamentally nonverbal, a rejection of the compromises and accommodations that language can make possible” (58). Silence in the face of violence is a concept important to tragedy as well, albeit mostly for women, of whom Sophocles’ Tecmessa in *Ajax* and Aeschylus’ Iphigenia in *Agamemnon* are but two examples. Iphigenia is perhaps the best-known example. When she is set to be sacrificed, Agamemnon cries out, “‘gag her hard, a sound will curse the house’ – / and the bridle chokes her voice...her saffron robes / pouring over the sand / her glance like arrows showering / wounding every murderer with pity / clear as a picture, live, / she strains to call their names” (111). Here, as Anderson describes, in the face of violence, Iphigenia’s words fail, like Smith’s during his interrogation, and much like the words of the crowd at the end of “Answer.” Curious as to who the two men were that killed the Clutters, many townspeople stand outside the courthouse waiting for them to arrive, and “when the crowd caught sight of the murderers, with their escort of blue-coated highway patrolmen, it fell silent, as though amazed to find them humanly shaped” (248). The section devoted to the spoken word, where the acts of violence that set the book into motion are described through the words of the man who pulled the trigger, ends in a resounding silence.

Anderson is not only talking about silence as a thematic device, but also as a rhetorical one. He provides several examples from much of Capote’s work where Capote “deliberately withholds information and interpretation” (49). Anderson uses Capote’s choice not to show the events of the murder until much later in the book as an example. This choice, he says, mirrors Capote’s fondness for withholding information as he did in his earlier novels—see, for example,

the first half of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. The purposeful delay of the murder details, like the unexplained red tennis ball that bounces down the steps in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, exemplifies a carefully chosen secret to be revealed when it will have the maximum effect on the reader.

Capote withholding information in *In Cold Blood* is a bit different from the same practice in fictional works. Fictionally arranging a nonfiction work so as to produce story arcs and good suspenseful reading is well within the scope of authorial power, but when an author chooses not to include a detail at all in fiction the detail simply disappears. In nonfiction however, especially which has been well researched and documented, details that are not included remain, for they at one time existed, and in the case of Capote's work, still exist in manuscript form. Capote's tendency to keep information from his audience until later in his books in fiction is taken to a new level with *In Cold Blood*; he chooses not to include information at all, and in some cases the details of the murder he chooses not to include, if left in, would have drastically changed the shape of his narrative, especially those pertaining to the *anagnorisis*, interrogation, confession, murder details, and ultimately the silence at the section's ending.

Some particularly telling details Capote excludes are the full court proceedings of the appeal, and a large amount of information Hickock wrote to the court about the conditions under which he confessed in Las Vegas. Out of the court proceedings, all of the appeals he wrote, and the rest of his 71-page letter to the supreme court, the quoted passage below shows most vividly how Hickock was brutalized in order for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to gain a confession. Had Capote included this lengthy passage, or any of its details, his connection to tragedy would have been lost, for the *anagnorisis* passage occurred just before these events took place, and the crucial change from the murderers believing he had been apprehended for simply writing bad

checks, to the knowledge that the Kansas Bureau of Investigation is aware of their involvement in the Clutter murders, the major turning point in the text, would have been a result of violent actions rather than speech.

After being interrogated by K.B.I agents for approximately five and a half hours, on January 2, 1960, I was returned to my cell in the maximum security ward of the Las Vegas, City Jail. Due to the lengthy interrogation, I had missed the evening meal. After being in my cell for some fifteen minutes, a uniformed officer came to the door and inquired as to whether or not I was hungry.

After answering that I was, the officer unlocked the door and motioned for me to precede [*sic*] him down the hallway. I noticed two additional officers standing outside the “drunk tank” at the far end of the hallway.

When I arrived opposite these two officers, the one following me struck me in the middle of the back (with what I donnot [*sic*] know), and the two additional officers each grasped one of my arms.

The officer behind then struck me two or three additional times. The officer holding my left arm asked me if I was going to be difficult or if I was going to save myself a lot of trouble and play ball.

I was then asked to put my signature on a sheet of yellow paper.

I can't say, with all honesty, whether or not there was any writing on the paper. But, I'm inclined to believe there wasn't.

In answer to the officer's demand, I told him where he could put the paper he was waving. (To be completely honest, the language I used would suit a dock hand.)

The officer holding my write [sic] arm then hit me in the stomach. This caused me to pass out and to be sick. When I regained the use of my faculties, I was lying on the floor of the drunk tank. I had upchucked and was lying in it.

I was then asked if I changed my mind. I never answered, just shook my head, and faked like I had fainted. Two of the officers grasped me under my arms and returned me to my cell. My cell partner – a colored man by the name of Banks – helped me to clean up. I never did receive anything to eat!

The following day I was again interrogated by K.B.I. agents. When I informed the agents of the previous night's treatment by Las Vegas police, I was met with "smiles." Several hours later, after being threatened with a lynch mob on my return to Garden City – plus further working over in the drunktank [sic], I signed a confession. (Hickock, Petition)

Capote's decision not to include any part of this information is interesting, and the only logical reasons are, first, his characterization of the K.B.I. agents, especially of Alvin Dewey, as straight-laced, by the book investigators, eliminates the possibility of this occurring. Second, had Capote included this information their confessions would have been tainted since the confessions were obtained through the use of brutal and illegal force, not speech-acts, and the confessions would have simply been given under duress. Last, the meaningful silence at the section's conclusion would not have resonated as it did, for Hickock reports he was threatened with violence in the form of a lynch mob upon his arrival in Kansas. Capote's choice to replace these possible violent-acts with speech-acts and meaningful silences is well-chosen, for by doing so, he maintains the tragic tradition of dictating rather than showing violence. Thus, the

confession, the *anagnorisis*, the murder itself, and the meaningful silence at the end occur without violence, allowing speech and silence to rule his violent text.

CATHARSIS: OMNISCIENT NARRATOR AND FICTIONALIZED ENDING

Of course, the final speech-act that sends Smith and Hickock down the long suffering road to the gallows is the death *sentence*, an event that Capote makes sure to emphasize. In the courtroom, Judge Tate announces the jury's decision: "Count one. We the jury find the defendant, Richard Eugene Hickock, guilty of the murder in the first degree, and the punishment is death." Tate pauses after this first sentence before he goes on to read, "three more convictions for Hickock, and four for Smith. '—and the punishment is death'; each time he came to the sentence, Tate enunciated it with a dark-toned hollowness" (307).

Tate's announcement is the final time violence is spoken about, rather than simply shown in the text. Until Capote's final section, characters merely dictate acts of violence; they do not perform them. The images describing the Clutter murder, which Smith provides, are censored. There are no gruesome details. For example, Mr. Clutter's slit throat is not graphic, it simply sounds like a man drowning, and Capote even allows Smith to justify himself: "I didn't mean it. I meant to call [Dick's] bluff, make him argue me out of it, make him admit he was a phony and a coward" (244). Then, later, "It wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They 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" (290). Even when there must be blunt description of the horrors that took place in the Clutter home, Capote does not describe them in a scene; he provides it through dialogue, effectively making the murder scene itself not a central scene, for a minor character, Larry Hendricks, a high school English teacher, narrates it:

[Nancy] was lying on her side, facing the wall, and the wall was covered with blood. [...] [Mrs. Clutter's] mouth had been taped with adhesive, but she'd been

shot point-blank in the side of the head, and the blast—the impact—had ripped the tape loose [...] [Kenyon] had been shot in the face, directly, head-on. [...] [Mr. Clutter] had been shot [...] but probably he was dead before he was shot. Or, anyway, dying. Because his throat had been cut, too (62-65).

All of the details Smith and Hendricks provide, as the messenger in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, are given after the fact. Yet, late in the book, Capote chooses to stray from this formula and present, in scenes rather than dialogue, the uncensored murder accounts of minor characters.

Capote shows the crimes committed by Smith and Hickock's Death Row friends in brutally narrated scenes. Andrews, a psychotic, pudgy, college kid of eighteen did not simply murder his family; he pulled the trigger and hit his "sister between the eyes, killing her instantly." He shot his mother three times and his father twice, then

the mother, eyes gaping, arms outstretched, staggered toward him; she tried to speak, her mouth opened, closed, but Lowell Lee said: 'Shut up.' To be certain she obeyed him, he shot her three times more. Mr. Andrews, however, was still alive; sobbing, whimpering, he thrashed along the floor toward the kitchen, but at the kitchen's threshold the son unholstered his revolver and discharged every chamber, then reloaded the weapon and emptied it again; altogether, his father absorbed seventeen bullets (313).

Similarly, two other Death Row residents, Ronnie York and James Latham's story of a cross country murder spree, show a bullet "crashing through [an] old man's skull" and an eighteen-year-old girl ending up as "blood-soaked wreckage at the bottom of a ravine" (324).

These acts of violence could have easily been narrated by the assailants, for Capote was regularly in contact with them during his visitations with Smith and Hickock, but their graphic

inclusions are carefully chosen, for Capote wants to build toward his book's climax, the executions, the high point of the book that acts as the *catharsis*. Aristotle uses the word *catharsis* to describe a kind of purification that happens when watching tragedy. Simon Goldhill asserts, "scholars interested in the psychology of tragedy have stressed the value of the emotional release involved in watching the representation of such transgressive stories" (353). This emotional release, then, has a cleansing, purifying effect for the viewer, an effect Aristotle opines is the most "distinct mark of tragic imitation," and Capote withholds violence until the very end in order to build and ultimately cause this release (22). Capote himself said in an interview that he gave this thought as he constructed his narrative. Trenton Hickman speaks of an interview with Capote in which stated, "allowing the reader to witness such details had, in his view at least, an ameliorative effect on them because it offered readers a 'healthy form of release' and that would 'serve as a tranquilizer for the libido'" (472). The details to which Capote alludes are specifically the near rape of Nancy Clutter, which Hickman discusses later in his article.

Hickman argues that the strongest example of Capote purposefully delaying a cathartic moment for the audience is Hickcock's near rape of Nancy Clutter. Later in the book, Hickcock's letter indicates that raping Nancy was one of the most prominent things on Hickcock's mind, but as the moment draws dangerously near, Hickman argues that the "rape attempt takes center stage during the Clutters' final moments, eclipsing Dick's desire to find the supposed safe that initially leads them to the Clutter farm" (471). Until this point, the reader does not know for certain if Nancy was raped or not, for though Capote includes earlier evidence that thwarts its possibility, his emphasis on the subject allows for the possibility. What this provides is a window through which one can see Capote's power over the text and his ability to order the events in such a way as to build tension and shape emotions that are ultimately released.

These emotions are meant to be released during the executions of the murderers. It is apparent that Capote wishes the executions themselves to act as the cathartic moment for several reasons. First, Capote deliberately delays showing any violent actions that occur within the timeline of the story. While he does begin to set violent acts in scenes later in the text, they have occurred in the past and are only relevant as exposition, not to move the plot forward, and Capote, as mentioned earlier, even removes violent scenes to stay faithful to this model. Second, the emotions purged during a true *catharsis* are pity and fear, which are felt for the murderers during the executions, for Capote spends the entirety of “The Corner” giving psychological diagnoses and recreating the excruciatingly long and soul destroying sentence on death row, both of which point toward wrongful treatment and imprisonment. Third, Capote alludes to sight during Hickock’s hanging: “The trap door opened, and Hickock hung for all to see a full twenty minutes” and the act of beholding is necessary for the successful cathartic moment. Fourth, after both men have been hanged, Capote specifically refers to climax and release. Dewey, who has witnessed the hanging, imagines “that with the deaths of Smith and Hickock, he would experience a sense of climax, release, and of a design justly completed.” All of these reasons indicate that Capote has *catharsis* in mind, but rather than ending like a traditional tragedy as soon as the climax is reached, instead, Capote decides to take his book in a different direction from traditional tragedy and end on a more uplifting note. This does not disprove that the executions are meant to act as the book’s *catharsis*, and in fact strongly suggests that Capote had the idea in mind while he composed. What it does imply, however, is that his book does not operate on the same rules as tragedy, just that he used tragedy as a model.

What Capote’s choice to end his book differently than the traditional tragedy also suggests is that while the hangings acts as a kind of *catharsis* for readers, the actual experience

of witnessing the executions was much different. According to David Guest and Trenton Hickman, Capote is only able to build towards the cathartic moment at the end because of the authorial power he has, due to the extraordinary amount of facts he possesses. However, though Capote may be the only person in possession of these facts, the way he presents them, through a narrator that is, as Guest asserts, “omniscient and impotent,” effectively drains him of the ability to connect emotionally with his text (109). It is likely that Capote’s inability to include his emotions because of his absence could have caused the fiction at the end, for he was in considerable emotional turmoil just before and after the executions, the same time he was writing the book’s ending.

Available in Capote’s manuscripts, but also published later in *Too Brief a Treat*, is a letter Capote wrote to Cecil Beaton on April 19, that reads “Perry and Dick were executed last Tuesday. I was there because they wanted me to be. It was a terrible experience. Something I will never really get over” (421). In the manuscripts there is a similar letter to Donald Cullivan, Smith’s army friend. In Capote’s official biography, Clarke records that Capote wrote many such letters most of which are available in the Capote archive at the NYPL, while others are in collections at Smith College, St. John’s College, and in the private collections of Capote’s friends (355). He told George Plimpton in the *New York Times* interview, republished in Plimpton’s biography of the author, that he “had great difficulty writing the last six or seven pages [of *In Cold Blood*]. This even took a physical form: hand paralysis—very awkward, as I always write in longhand” (209). It stands to reason then that while he carefully controls the emotions of his readers, allowing them emotional release at the end, as Hickman mentions, he hinders his own ability to participate in this same release. Because he was present at the executions, yet could not include any of his own thoughts and feelings, he was forced to “end in

peace” more for his own sake than for the book’s plot requirements. Though his intended emotional release for the readers occurs pages before with the executions of the murderers, Capote’s need to satisfy his emotional connection to the material shapes the reader’s emotions differently from a traditional tragedy, which typically ends in the deaths of their tragic heroes after they have been made to suffer horribly—Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound*, for instance. Yet Capote provides an additional emotional flourish not by stepping in as the narrator or focal point of the text, but by continuing to remain absent, and though he appears to do so to satisfy his emotional connection to the material, it still functions as an instance that strongly illustrates the difference between Capote the author and the narrator he creates for his book. He uses this narrator in much the same way as Sophocles used his choruses.

CONCLUSION: CHORUS

Chorus, from the Greek χορός (*choros*), an ancient Homeric word meaning dance, is a crucial, and much debated, element of Greek tragedy. Aristotle talks of it briefly in the *Poetics* giving an account of different choric songs such as the *parode* and *stasimon*, before later mentioning that the chorus should play a part in the action, much like a character, “not in the manner of Euripides but of Sophocles” (36). Sophocles’ choruses are widely regarded as the most supreme of the three tragedians. Cynthia P. Gardiner and R. W. B. Burton both published book length studies of the chorus in his extant tragedies, and Gardiner explains that the difference between Sophocles’ choruses and those of his peers is, as Aristotle mentions, how the chorus members function as “recognizable and distinctive dramatic characters. Their personae are as extensively developed as those of many of the principals, and they have been so individualized that some vividly contrast with others of the same human type.” She cites the dramatic differences between the Theban lords in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, which she notes are “as different as the Odysseuses of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, or as the mariticides Deianeira and Clytemnestra” (178). While Sophocles’ choruses are superior for this reason, they still serve very specific purposes his plays, and Capote creates this role within his text to serve some of the same purposes.

There have been many definitions of the chorus’s role within tragedy, the most notable of which is probably August Wilhelm Schlegel’s remark that the chorus functions as the “ideal spectator.” Gardiner mentions that this view held for over a century and a half of German scholarship, but she discounts it significantly. Instead, she offers first-hand proof from Aristophanes, though he was a comic playwright, and comic choruses are somewhat different

from tragic ones, that choruses can be tricked by a principal character wearing a disguise, and as a result, they can “hardly have been commonly accepted as an ‘ideal spectator’” (2).

What is more likely is that the chorus served several purposes for Sophocles. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, they remind the audience, and Oedipus, of crucial details. For instance, as Bernard Knox notes in *Oedipus at Thebes*, the chorus reminds Oedipus that his blindness “is his own choice, the result of his own independent action after the recognition of the truth. This was not called for by the prophecy of Apollo, nor was it demanded in the oracle’s instructions about the murderer’s punishment or the curse on him pronounced by Oedipus. It was Oedipus’ autonomous action” (186). Here, the chorus of Thebans also shares insight into Oedipus’ character, insights that the audience may not have known otherwise. Additionally, the chorus asks Oedipus why he blinded himself, to which he replies, “What I did was best—don’t lecture me, / no more advice. I, with *my* eyes, / how could I look my father in the eyes when I go down to death? [...] Worse yet, the sight of my children, born as they were born, how could I long to look into their eyes?” (243). The chorus, then, in addition to sharing character insight, also interrogates Oedipus, giving him an opportunity to speak about the motivations for actions, an opportunity that he would not have had otherwise. Finally, R. W. B. Burton opines that Sophocles’ chorus worked to remind Athenians about contemporary issues, and “odes such as the first *stasimon* of *Antigone*, the *parados* of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the first three *stasima* of *Oedipus at Colonus*, while primarily belonging to the world of dramatic illusion, at the same time speak to the audience with a voice from the real world” (4). Without the chorus, theatergoers perhaps would not have been able to interpret how Sophocles’ plays echoed the current unpleasantness of their city brought on by plague, war, and social upheaval.

Among other things, Sophocles' choruses provided character insight, a way for characters to share the motivations for their actions, and also bridged the gap between the stage and contemporary Athenian life. Surely, after providing so many details from Capote's text in this essay, the connections between Capote's narrator and Sophocles' choruses can be made.

Without question Capote's narrator offers character insight. The book is largely a long profile of many characters, especially Smith, Hickock, Dewey, and the Clutters. Indeed by conducting extensive interviews, Capote is able to empower his narrator with the ability to recreate not only characters' actions, but also their thoughts, making his readers as familiar as possible with the various people in the story. Hickman suggests that Capote grants his narrator supervisory and panoptic power to probe "Smith and Hickock's damaged psyches" in order to conclude that "some mental dysfunction dealt Smith and Hickock the deranged hand of cards they are 'forced' to play in Holcomb" (466). Exercising this supervisory power is not unlike the Sophoclean chorus, whose role is also supervisory, and while, as the example from *Oedipus Tyrannus* suggests, the chorus' point of view is a limited one, its powers of observation give Sophocles the ability to shape characters according to the chorus' gaze. Bernard Knox cites Oedipus becoming aware of the chorus's presence as an example. Oedipus, blinded and lost, thanks the chorus for looking after him. His awareness "is an expression of his utter dependency on others; he is so far from action now that he needs help even to exist" (186). Simply by having the chorus ever present, Sophocles is given the ability to shape a character in a certain fashion.

Capote places his narrator in a similar position, and it is easy to mistake Capote himself for his chorus, Capote's constructed narrator. For clarity, Capote is the man himself, the homosexual, cosmopolitan, socialite writing the book. His narrator, as Hickman identifies, is a heterosexualized male. Hickman writes that this narrator's gaze, while it works to focus intensely

on Nancy Clutter, “narrows most not when managing and situating the female characters within *In Cold Blood* but when choreographing his depiction of Perry Smith. While finding Dick Hickock to be a cold, manipulative figure, Capote's narrator characterizes Perry Smith in sympathetic, nurturing, stereotypically ‘feminine’ terms. For example, the narrator ‘reports’ that Perry has feet that ‘would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers’ (470). By characterizing his narrator in this way, he was able to shape characters according to the narrator’s presence, very similar to Sophocles’ method.

The narrator’s ability to supervise is nearly unlimited, and the reader is allowed access not only to Nancy Clutter’s bedroom watching her beauty routine, but also into Smith’s letters from his father, and other biographical and historical information. Despite all of this, in the book’s final section, Capote makes a strange choice by presenting information that was never offered to anyone—the testimony of the court appointed psychiatrist, Dr. W. Mitchell Jones. There are two instances, for Hickock and then for Smith, where Capote writes “had Dr. Jones been allowed to speak further, here is what he would have testified” (294). Capote stops the narrative’s forward motion, allowing his narrator to pry into testimony that was never given. This instance is far different from presenting the book’s other details like diary entries, phone conversations, dialogue, and letters because the testimony never existed. Thus, the book’s narrator, simply by narrating gives existence to testimony that never occurred and allows Dr. Jones to comment on Smith and Hickock’s character, effectively justifying their actions at the Clutter home, as Oedipus justifies his self-mutilation to the chorus, and if Sophocles’ chorus were not present, Oedipus would never have been given the opportunity to do so.

The narrator Capote created gazes intensely at the story’s unfolding. Part of Capote’s intention when he created this heterosexualized male onlooker could have been to comment on the act of reportage and its power, but what arises from this commentary is a kind of Greek

chorus for it possesses many of the same features. Whereas Sophocles' chorus says, "O the terror— / the suffering, for all the world to see, / the worst terror that ever met my eyes. What madness swept over you" (239), Capote's narrator proclaims

"The trap door opened, and Hickock hung for all to see a full twenty minutes before the prison doctor at last said, 'I pronounce this man dead.' A hearse, its blazing headlights beaded with rain, drove into the warehouse, and the body, placed on a litter and shrouded under a blanket, was carried to the hearse and out into the night. Staring after it, Roy Church shook his head: 'I never would have believed he had the guts. To take it like he did. I had him tagged a coward'" (339).

The similarities between these two passages are likely coincidental, but Capote is able to do with the narrator exactly what Sophocles does with his chorus; that is to comment on the gruesome scene, and comment on character. The narrator is capable of doing this because it is granted access to everything, because he is ever-present, like the chorus.

It was the creation of this narrator/chorus that allowed Capote to distance himself (the homosexual, cosmopolitan, socialite) from the book's happenings. Capote was deeply involved with the actual events he writes about, to the point where certain events would not have happened without him, such as Smith and Hickock getting appeal lawyers, for which Capote paid, for instance. Even with all of his careful manipulation, Capote himself makes two appearances in the book, meaning his attendance at events he describes in *In Cold Blood* is documented in Clarke's biography, or Capote's own notes. His presence is then glossed over by the narrator to keep Capote absent. The executions have already been mentioned, where he is

understood to be one of the “twenty-odd witnesses” that Dewey observes during Smith and Hickock’s final moments (337). The other is documented in Capote’s manuscripts:

“Last night went to the Deweys for dinner, and while there AD [Alvin Dewey] got the call he’d been waiting for these past seven weeks; it was about eight oclock and we’d just sat down to dinner (cornbread, peas and rice, fried steaks) in the kitchen when the phone rang [...] and AD, who had just sat down to the table, after drinking three scotches, went to answer. When he came back to the table he said: ‘Well, if you can keep a secret, this is IT: our agent out in Las Vegas said they just nabbed those two guys...Smith and Hickock.

“Marie almost burst into tears: ‘Oh honey...honey I can’t believe it.’ AD was too excited to eat.

“Seems they had been trailing Smith and Hickock longer than we supposed: since the first week after the murder, after the hired hand, (who had worked for Clutter 1948-1949, and left of his own volition) had called from Lansing prison to tell them about his former cellmate, Hickock” (Capote, Alvin Dewey).

In the book, this scene is fictionalized and seems to be what he was talking about in a letter to Marie Dewey, dated August 16, 1961, when he says “Not that I mind inventing details, as you will see!” (*Too Brief a Treat* 326). In the text, the narrator records Dewey’s claim that the call comes while Alvin is in the bath and she is setting the table to entertain friends “the Murrays, and Cliff and Dodie Hope” (212). Though this fabrication would have been criticized had it been discovered when the main topic of conversation about *In Cold Blood* concerned whether or not its events were true, it seems a necessary one because by going to this great length to efface

himself, Capote grants the narrator the ability to get to the heart of the matter, the important facts that push the story forward, that do the most work—pursue, apprehend, punish—the details that signify the larger narrative at work composing not only the world of the book but the world in which it exists. As George Garrett writes, “the ‘real’ world of America as revealed in this story, of which Capote said at the time ‘It’s what I really think about America,’ has come to pass, is far more a matter of public fact than private vision. Who today would deny that we live in a ‘desperate, savage, violent America (that is) in collision with sane, safe, insular, even smug America’? In that sense *In Cold Blood* can qualify as prophecy” (474). By remaining absent, and creating a narrator who tells the story, Capote created a world not exactly like a Greek tragedy, but governed by the same rules, which he saw, as did Miller, O’Neill, and Dreiser before him, as symbolic of America during his time.

On the one hand, Capote saw Perry Smith as a new form of tragic hero. While he does possess a very specific flaw and realizes that this flaw has caused him to err in a way that reverses the trajectory of his life, because there was significant proof that he was mentally damaged, his long prison sentence and execution were without reason, yet he is still made to suffer horribly. On the other hand, Hickock, the more traditional tragic hero, driven by envy, does not kill, yet is still responsible, and is given punishment to the same degree. The chorus in his book, as Burton mentions, enables the reader to make these connections to America’s changing zeitgeist, and by hinting at the details fleshed out in this essay, *hamartia*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*, chorus, and all their accompaniments, Capote is able to make his tragic vision of America a reality. This vision required him to carefully include the specific elements from his manuscripts, without including others, that made the world appear as if it was indeed the tragic one he saw.

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APPENDIX A: CAPOTE'S EYE REFERENCES IN "THE LAST TO SEE THEM
ALIVE"

The following is a selective list of references to seeing, eyes, and instruments through which seeing is aided in the first part of *In Cold Blood*.

Sight

- The section is entitled "The Last to *See* Them Alive."
- On the first page, Capote remarks that Holcomb "can be *seen* from great distances."
- The crime causes Holcombites to "*view* each other strangely and as strangers" (5).
- Mr. Clutter planted fruit trees by the Arkansas River at the rear of his property, his "attempt to contrive, rain or no, a patch of the paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden, he *envisioned*" (12-13).
- Kenyon's dog, Teddy has one flaw: "let him *glimpse* a gun [...] and his head dropped, his tail turned in" (13).
- Waiting for the tardy Hickock to arrive, Smith sits in a diner *looking* "out a window at the silent small-town street, a street he had never *seen* until yesterday" (14).
- One of Smith's chief ways to pass the time is mirror-*gazing*, Hickock recalls "Every time you *see* a mirror, you go into a trance, like. Like you was *looking* at some gorgeous piece of butt" (15).
- Smith envisions playing the tune "I'll Be *Seeing* You" to a packed Vegas house (16).
- Hickock says, "I didn't want [my father] to *see* me taking the gun out of the house"(23).

- Smith recalls meeting Hickock’s parents: “[Your father] hates me [...] So does your mother. I could *see*—the ineffable way they *looked* at me” (23) to which Hickock replies “Nothing to do with you. As such. It’s just they don’t like me *seeing* anybody from the Walls” (23-24).
- The bookmark in Mrs. Clutter’s bible reads “Take ye heed, *watch* and pray, for ye know not when the time is,” (30).
- Hickock boasts that they will not need disguises because “anyone they encountered would not live to bear *witness*. ‘No *witnesses*,’ he reminded Perry” (37).
- Foreshadowing, Capote reports Smith thinking “it was stupid not to admit that there might be a *witness* they hadn’t *seen*” (37).
- After detailing his final encounter with Nancy, Mr. Paul Helm says “that was the last I *seen* them. Nancy leading old Babe off to the barn. Like I said, nothing out of the ordinary” (41).
- Mr. Johnson, the insurance salesman, *observes* Mr. Clutter as he ponders signing a life insurance policy, as the meeting wears on, Mr. Johnson, gravely ironic, says “From the *looks* of you [...] we’re likely to have you around a couple of weeks more” (46-47).
- *Glaring* at the Kansas countryside, Smith shows his dislike for its flatness, adding ‘Christ—and they told me to keep away from Kansas! [...] As though they were barring me from heaven. And just *look* at it. Just feast your *eyes*.’” (48-49).
- When Bobby Rupp comes up the drive to the Clutter home on their final night alive he mentions that he “didn’t *see* anybody outside” (50).

- Rupp’s last impression of the Clutter home on that final night was as follows: “‘It was clear as day—the moon was so bright—and cold and kind of windy; a lot of tumbleweed blowing about. But that’s all I *saw*. Only now when I think back, I think somebody must have been hiding there. Maybe down among the trees. Somebody just waiting for me to leave’” (52).
- In reference to his view of Smith being a conscienceless “natural killer”, Hickock theorizes that “such a gift could, under his *supervision*, be profitably exploited” (55).
- Approaching the house, Sue Kidwell, one of Nancy’s friends, recalls that as she approached the Clutter home “everything *looked* too bright and quiet” (59).
- When she discovers Nancy’s body, Kidwell remarks “‘I only remember Nancy’s Teddy bear *staring* at me. And Nancy. And running...’” (60).
- When Bobby Rupp takes off running toward Holcomb, his brother tells him “‘Hey, Bobby. Listen. They won’t let you *see* her. It won’t do any good’” (72).

Eyes

- On page 16, Capote mentions Smith’s “dark, moist *eyes*” then, two pages later, mentions Nancy’s *eyes*: “wide apart, darkly translucent, like ale held to the light.”
- Hickock has a tiny blue dot tattooed beneath his left *eye* identifying him as a former inmate (24).
- Capote describes Hickock whose “*eyes* not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left *eye* being truly serpentine, with a venomous, sickly-blue squint” (31).
- Discussing the possibility of disguising themselves with women’s hosiery Hickock asks “‘What about my *eye*? They’re all too light-colored to hide that’” (37).

- Pulling up to the Clutter driveway, Hickock “doused the headlights, slowed down, and stopped until his *eyes* were adjusted to the moon-illuminated night” (57).
- Larry Hendricks, who is called upon to inspect the Clutter home, decides that he’d “better keep [his] *eyes* open. Make a note of every detail” (61-62).
- Discovering Mrs. Clutter’s body, Hendricks recounts, “Her *eyes* were open. Wide open. As though she were still *looking* at the killer. Because she must have had to *watch* him do it—aim the gun” (63).
- Discovering a footprint, Mr. Hendricks describes it as “a half-sole footprint with circles—two holes in the center like a pair of *eyes*” (65).

Seeing Instruments

- Mr. Clutter wears “*rimless glasses*” (6).
- Of all the ornaments in the office, Capote chooses to mention Mr. Clutter’s *binoculars*, which Smith and Hickock later steal (18).
- Mrs. Clutter has two pairs of glasses, her ordinary *glasses* and “a pair of reading *spectacles*” (30).
- Kenyon also wears *glasses*, which hindered his ability to take more of a part in team sports (38).
- According to Mr. Hendricks, they found Kenyon’s *glasses* lying on the floor of his room (62).
- Mr. Clutter as well did not have his *glasses* when he was killed (63).

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote. Start Your Free Trial. Menu. Study Guide. Summary. Chapter Summaries. Part 1, Chapters 1-4 Summary. When Capote is describing Holcomb, Kansas, he writes about "grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples." This is a simile in which the tall grain elevators are compared to elegant Greek temples. Further Reading: check Approved by eNotes Editorial. list Cite. link Link. jenniferhays | Certified Educator. calendarEducator since 2006. In Cold Blood study guide contains a biography of Truman Capote, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. Critics have described the opening passage of In Cold Blood as "Homeric" (after the Greek epic poet Homer, the author of the Iliad and Odyssey). Capote's descriptions of the landscape and built environment lend them a mythological stature, foreshadowing the enormity of the events to follow: "The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as the Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them" (3). Finney County becomes the theatre.