In Cold Blood - Fable or Fact?

A Study of New Journalism and how reality is depicted in Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to establish whether *In Cold Blood* could be considered to be the true account Truman Capote intended it to be. Capote spent many years researching the murder in Kansas with the aim of writing a news story in the style of fiction. Even so, this essay argues that it is not a completely true account. In order to reach a conclusion this essay studies the concept of new journalism and answers the following questions:

- What are the problems of depicting reality in writing?
- What narrative techniques are found in *In Cold Blood*?
- Is *In Cold Blood* subjective or objective in its portrayal of the story and its characters?

The conclusion also shows that *In Cold Blood* is too manipulated and subjective in order to be seen as a completely true account that can be read as a news story. It is merely one view of the murder and *In Cold Blood* is therefore best read as a fiction novel.
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1. INTRODUCTION

*In Cold Blood* is an extraordinary murder story written by Truman Capote. It is the story of two men slaughtering a farmer and his family in Kansas in 1959. It was first published as a series in *The New Yorker* in 1965 and in the beginning of the following year it was published in book form (Wolfe 40). Capote experimented with fiction and journalism when creating *In Cold Blood*, which was a huge success. The remarkable thing about the book is that Capote intended to write a true story in every aspect, and not simply base it on a true story. He did not intend to invent scenes, dialogues and details, as is often done in other novels that are based on true events (Hellmann 27). Instead Capote wanted to write a true story in the sense that every detail in the book should be fact. Capote spent 5 or 6 years in Kansas going through documentation and interviewing people involved in order to get every detail right (Wolfe 41, Hollowell 32). He highlights the factual content in the acknowledgments and declares that he has used official records, interviews with the persons involved in the case and his own observations as material for the book. The Kansas murder case was given plenty of attention in the media, therefore most people already knew the story and also that it ended with the execution of the two killers. Despite that, Capote managed to create a hugely successful and exciting book that is hard to put down.

During this time there was a change going on in journalism. Journalists had started using the narrative techniques found in fiction in their news reports. The technique was wildly debated and many thought that this style of writing, called *new journalism*, was soon to fade away. However, when Capote, an already famous and successful author, published his novel in the style of new journalism it was a huge success. As a result new journalism gained popularity (Wolfe 40). Even so, Capote claimed that he was not part of new journalism but had created a new literary genre, which he called the nonfiction novel. No matter what, *In Cold Blood* had a big influence on new journalism (Wolfe 41).

This essay investigates whether it is actually possible to consider *In Cold Blood* as a true account. I do not doubt that it is well researched and that the facts Capote refers to in the text are accurate. However, I believe the style of writing and the way the novel is structured and what facts have been included and excluded affect the way the novel is read and understood by the reader. Therefore I argue that the aspect of ‘truth’ is damaged. The structure and the style of the text surely influence the story’s reception. Has the book then become too much like fiction to be called a true account? Capote uses techniques that are characteristic of fiction, also he remembers exact dialogues without taking notes or using a tape recorder when collecting his material. According to Torsten Thurén the journalistic genre
is problematic because the risk that the author manipulates the reader is greater than in fiction or academic texts (Thurén 390). Some researchers and journalists even argue that you have to lie in order to tell the truth (Thurén 19-20). This essay aims to show that *In Cold Blood* cannot be considered as a true account. The fictional techniques and the subjectivity of the text make the reader doubt its factual content. In the following I investigate the problems of depicting reality in fiction and nonfiction, what narrative techniques are used in *In Cold Blood* and objectivity and subjectivity so as to reach a conclusion about my thesis statement.

2. THESIS STATEMENT
This essay argues that *In Cold Blood* is not a true account because of the subjectivity and the fictional techniques used by Capote. It harms the credibility of the book to an extent that does not make *In Cold Blood* believable as a true account. My argument is developed by a discussion of the following questions:

*What are the problems of depicting reality in writing?* Describing reality can be problematic both in fiction and nonfiction since reality is an ambiguous term. The concept of reality is also a theoretical problem for literary studies; however, this study does not investigate this problem for its own sake. I have chosen to remain close to the problems brought up by the text *In Cold Blood*.

*What narrative techniques are found in In Cold Blood?* Narrative plays an important role on how the reader interprets the text. I have therefore analysed some narrative techniques used in fiction and in new journalism and related them to *In Cold Blood*.

*Is In Cold Blood subjective or objective in its portrayal of the story and its characters?* It is nearly impossible to be completely objective, however, I have investigated whether subjectivity could be said to damage *In Cold Blood* as a true account.

3. MATERIAL & METHOD
The material chosen for this essay mostly consists of books, other than an essay written by Nick Rance, that deals with new journalism and Capote’s style of writing. Gerard Genette, Wayne C. Booth and Peter Barry will be used in the chapter about literary techniques in order to give a clear picture of the techniques used when writing fiction. The intention is to see what literary techniques Capote used in his writing. A close reading of *In Cold Blood* will be performed with the intention to answer the questions in the section above. When writing about
reality and truth I refer to real life or something that describes the real world outside fiction without the author having invented sections or dialogues. And when discussing new journalism I refer to the new wave within journalism during the 1960s which wrote news articles in the style of fiction and portrayed their personal experiences of the news. Nonfiction refers to the genre that sets out to tell the truth and show real life and facts, much like a documentary. New journalism is also a kind of nonfiction.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
In Style As Argument from 1987 Chris Anderson investigates the value of style in nonfiction literature. He argues that journalism and written documentaries are not simply a way to inform the reader, they also try to influence the reader’s opinions and attitudes. The literary techniques that are used in nonfiction and new journalism are there for the rhetorical purpose of persuading the reader (2). Anderson discusses Capote’s style of writing and his use of authorial silence. In the analysis I investigate what effect rhetorical techniques, such as authorial silence, have on the understanding of the novel.

Another source that I have used is Tom Wolfe’s New Journalism, first published in 1973. Wolfe is one of the most famous names within new journalism. He gives the reader an historical overview of new journalism, how it all started and how it was received by the audience. Wolfe states that there were no actual rules of how to write new journalism therefore, the journalist could use whatever techniques they wanted:

For the gluttonous Goths there is still only the outlaw’s rule regarding techniques: take, use, improvise. The result is a form that is not merely like a novel. It consumes devices that happen to have originated with the novel and mixes them with every other device known to prose. And all the while, quite beyond matters of technique, it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what a power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows all this actually happened. The disclaimers have been erased. The screen is gone. The writer is one step closer to the absolute involvement of the reader that Henry James and James Joyce dreamed and never achieved. (48-49)

Wolfe argues that no one can claim that new journalists have avoided to “evaluate the material” (54). He states that “All the New Journalists I have mentioned in this piece customarily go to great lengths (even overboard in some cases) to analyze and evaluate their material, although seldom in a moralistic fashion” (54).
In *Fables of Fact*, published in 1981, John Hellmann argues that new journalism should be read as fiction since “it deals with fact through fable, discovering, constructing, and self-consciously exploring meaning beyond our media-constructed ‘reality’, our ‘news.’” (xi). Hellmann states that new journalists aim at creating art and that they privilege the artistic side of writing, valuing it higher than fact. Therefore, Hellmann also suggests that new journalists are at risk of sacrificing the truth in order to get a strong spectacular narrative. Some writers have even at some point changed facts, even though most new journalists are very thorough with details according to Hellmann (18). This is problematic since new journalism is said to portray nothing but the truth to the reader. Hellmann also discusses the author-reader contract, something that to a great extent affects the way the reader interprets the text (27). The author-reader contract has to be clear and accepted by both the reader and the writer for it to have an effect and not make the reader misunderstand the author’s intention (28).

Torsten Thurén also discusses the author-reader contract in his dissertation, *Reportagets Rika Repertoar* from 1992. He argues the importance of stating whether the text is fact or fiction since fact and fiction are read and experienced differently by the reader. If the text is read as fiction the reader does not care whether it is true or not. However, if a text is believed to be true and read as such, the reader presupposes that it tries to portray a true event. Therefore if it is not stated the reader can be made to believe that the text is true when in fact it is not and the author’s intentions are misinterpreted (22-23). He explains the problems of describing reality and truth, both the outer problems and the inner problems of feelings and thoughts (320-321). He also shows how literary techniques are used in order to provide certain feelings in the reader and the credibility of different sources.

Peter Hansen also points to the fact that the reader has different expectations of the text if it is fiction or fact in his book *Romanen och Verklighetsproblemet* published in 1996. He states that only if the reader is aware of it being a creative interpretation of reality can it be meaningful as an illusion of reality (11). Hansen deals with the problem of describing reality and whether it is even possible to describe reality in a truthful way. He believes that a realistic novel, seen as a depiction of reality, will always remain unsatisfying (254).

John Hollowell’s book, *Fact and Fiction* from 1977, points to the stylistic and thematic differences of the writers that have been classified as new journalists compared to conventional journalists. Also, he believes that they are a product of the instability and confusion of the American society in the 1960s (15). Hollowell states that some of the most
important differences to conventional journalism are the journalist’s relationship to the people he meets and the style of writing (22).

In *The New Journalism*, published in 1977, Michael L Johnson praises new journalism as a genre and Capote’s techniques of writing that provides a remarkable sense of place (49). Also he believes that the reader gets to judge for themselves without Capote’s interference.

Gay Talese and Barbara Lounsberry discuss the differences between literary nonfiction and what they call ordinary literature in *The Literature of Reality* from 1996. They find that the three main aspects that set literary nonfiction apart from other types of literature are the exhaustive research which allows the literary nonfiction writer to be artistic, the style of writing which these writers use as an intention to be artistic and also their intention to enrich our understanding of the world (29-30). Talese and Lounsberry are of the opinion that nonfiction is more than just fiction since it provides the reader with the best of both worlds: fact and art (30).

**4.2. Literary Techniques**

Since *In Cold Blood* is written like a fiction novel, this chapter of the essay investigates some of the different literary techniques used in fiction. It is based on Wayne C Booth’s work *The Rhetoric of Fiction* who is prominent within narratology, and also Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory*. Booth discusses the author’s presence in the chapter ‘Telling and Showing’. He argues that to go into a character’s mind is one of the most obviously fictional techniques used in fiction. We cannot see what other people think in real life, therefore, it cannot be done in fiction without the author’s intrusion. Booth argues that something that is not a part of real life is something that has been invented and added by the author (3). The author is therefore present whenever he changes the point of view (17). Booth also suggests that the author is in fact intrusive in every speech provided by characters since the author is an authority that controls the character’s speech (18). He believes that the author is always present in the text and can never vanish completely (20). Even so, the author may be present in an indirect manner. There are many other devices than direct commentaries that the author can use in order to get the message across. This is called authorial silence. The author can instead use symbols, pace and timing and select scenes that show his or her values in an impersonal narration (Booth 272). Authorial silence has effects that are difficult to reach in other ways, it is for example said to give a realistic feeling to the work (Booth 273). If the story is told from
the inside of a character, what they feel, think and how they look upon things, it is internal focalisation. And the character that presents its point-of-view to the reader could be called the focaliser (Barry 233). Zero focalisation is when the reader is allowed into the mind of many different characters to see their thoughts and feelings. It is more commonly known as omniscient narration (Barry 233).

### 4.3. New Journalism

In the 1960s some American journalists started to experiment with literary techniques in their writing. This was a major change in the style of writing journalism. The most prominent difference between conventional journalism and new journalism is the relationship to the people and events that are portrayed. In conventional journalism the writers strive for objectivity and to tell both sides of a story, they avoid using emotionally charged words and do not show their own opinions and values in the text. New journalism is a more subjective style of reporting. The journalist tries to understand the person that he interviews on a more emotional level in order to show a more personal reaction to an event. However, somewhat paradoxically, the new journalists strive for a higher level of objectivity by revealing their own opinions and tendencies (Hollowell 22). The new journalists want to tell the story behind the facts and therefore they do not give as much attention to official statements as conventional journalists do (Hollowell 22-23). Hollowell suggests that “The new journalist’s motive is to achieve a literary style comparable to fiction and to portray characters with psychological depth” (Hollowell 25). Johnson even argues that “in one way or another it has proven more thorough, more honest, and more intelligent critical than traditional journalism” (xiii). Wolfe suggests that the genre developed from travel literature written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Travel literature was influenced by autobiographies that were the only style of reporting in which it was completely acceptable for a reporter to stage scenes and dialogues (Wolfe 66).

Realism is another important influence on new journalism. During the 1960s journalists started learning the techniques of realism and the elements that made realism so powerful. Wolfe states that these techniques are “variously known as its ‘immediacy,’ its ‘concrete reality,’ its ‘emotional involvement,’ its ‘gripping’ or ‘absorbing’ quality” (46). Wolfe argues that all writers, of fiction as well as nonfiction, must use the techniques of realism in order to use their full capacity in their writing (49). The four main tools used by new journalists according to Wolfe are as follows:
The first is scene-by-scene construction, by which the writer presents the story by creating scenes and moving from one to the other and giving as little historical narrative as they can (Wolfe 46). The scenes should be played before the reader.

The second device that Wolfe identified is dialogue. By using full dialogues the reader becomes more involved in the story than any other literary technique could achieve.

The third-person point of view is the third tool. In the 1960s it was much more common for journalists to use a first-person point of view, however by using the third-person point of view the reader was given the feeling of being inside someone else’s mind and experiencing the event. Since the scene is described through the eyes of a witness or a character it becomes much more alive (Wolfe 46). They used an omniscient narrator that can enter all characters’ minds.

The fourth technique is to show details. The writer shows the character’s behaviour and how they “express their position in the world” (Wolfe 47). It can for example be by showing the character’s habits, gestures, manners, style of clothes, looks, glances, body language and the style of walking. And this is what makes the book so captivating (Wolfe 47). Symbols, imagery and other details can also be used by the author as a way of expressing opinions without using direct comments (Booth 272). All these techniques give the reader the feeling of actually experiencing the event and to see what the characters or witness think and feel.

Apart from Wolfe’s four devices Hollowell adds another two central tools that are common to new journalism. Interior monologue is when the reader enters the character’s mind and the event is presented through his thoughts without direct quotations. It provides a more complete picture of the event.

The second device is composite characterisation. One character is then created out of many. Interviews and research with many people are added into a new invented character that is to represent them all (Hollowell 29-30).

5. ANALYSIS
As seen in the theoretical background Wolfe is a fierce supporter of new journalism and he boldly states that new journalists have succeeded with involving the reader, something that famous writers such as Henry James and James Joyce only dreamt of achieving (Wolfe 48-49). It is a very daring statement that is bound to result in criticism. Hellmann, for instance, argues that new journalists instead of writing “realistically dramatized documentaries” (x) as
they suggest themselves, only “construct meaningful versions of the ‘news’” (x). They make up and change the news to make it useful and interesting by combining journalism and fiction. Hellmann sees new journalism as “the new fiction” (xi) and he argues that it “deals with fact through fable” (xi) and creates its own meaning of our conventional news (Hellmann x-xi). New journalists try to give the reader a more realistic experience by recreating how they or another witness experienced an event. They use observations and their imagination in order to do that, therefore, the writer’s own style and interpretation always affects the content of the work (Hellmann 7-8). Wolfe indicates that new journalists are superior to other writers by saying that they learned the techniques of realism by instinct rather than by having to study it (46). So their superiority has made them succeed with something that no one else could. Just like Wolfe, Talese and Lounsberry also support new journalism and they state that “Literary nonfiction is certainly not fiction—although some works read like novels. Artful nonfiction is more than fiction, offering the satisfying truths of fact and the ‘universal truths’ of art” (Talese & Lounsberry, 30). They even state that the best literature within the nonfiction genre re-creates reality and even makes us understand the world better (Talese & Lounsberry, 179). Hellmann points to a number of critics who all disagree with Wolfe and his claim that new journalism fulfils the aim of realism. Instead the critics argue that Wolfe’s work is highly unrealistic because of the style and shape of his own work. The critic D. H. Lawrence is quoted saying “never trust the artist. Trust the tale” (Hellmann 13). Hellmann is of the opinion that new journalism should be read as fiction and is best understood as such (24). He argues that a new journalist’s final aim is not to deliver facts, but to create art. “In a work of new journalism the author is most interested in the effect and idea he can communicate by form. However, exhaustive or important his reporting or analysis may be, his ultimate aim and achievement is an artistic one” (Hellmann 25). It gives the author’s personal experience of an event and could not be considered as facts. It is the result of external events and personal mind put together (Hellmann 25).

We shall now take a closer look at Capote’s novel In Cold Blood and see how the story is portrayed and what literary techniques that have been used and how they have affected the books meaning.

5.2. Style of Writing
First of all I relate the literary techniques presented in chapter 4.2 to In Cold Blood, and also investigate whether the techniques Wolfe found so important to realistic writing are used by
Capote. We already know that the book is written like a novel, therefore, this section works as a complement and emphasis to the rest of the analysis and it shows that the style of writing has a negative effect on the novel’s reliability.

*In Cold Blood* starts on the day of the murder and Capote frequently uses both analepsis and prolepsis. The first chapter is called ‘The Last to see Them Alive’ which is a prolepsis of the murder that is soon to take place. A paragraph about Mrs Clutter begins with “Now, on this final day of her life…” (Capote 28) and the paragraph ends with a quote from the bookmark that lies in Mrs Clutter’s bible “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Capote 28). These are both examples of prolepsis; another example is about Nancy “…she set out the clothes she intended to wear to church the next morning: nylons, black pumps, a red velveteen dress – her prettiest, which she herself had made. It was the dress in which she was to be buried” (Capote 55). The omniscient narrator creates an unpleasant feeling by referring to her burial. Analepsis is also used frequently in the text. When the reader gets to know Perry’s and Dick’s backgrounds and life it is in the shape of analepsis. That is also the case in the beginning of chapter 3 - ‘Answer’, when the reader finds out that the convict Floyd Wells heard about the murder on the radio only a few days after it happened and connected the murder to his former cellmate Dick (Capote 152-153). The plot moves both back and forth in time. For example when Dick and Perry reach the Clutter’s farmhouse right before the murder we are instead moved forth in time to the following Monday and Bobby Rupp’s testimony (Capote 48). Like Anderson points out the reader does not find out how the murder was committed until the killer’s testimony in the second half of the book (53). Even though the reader knows that the family was murdered that night they are left in the dark of exactly how it happened. This creates a curiosity in the reader and a desire to find out the truth. The reader is looking for clues just like the police in the story are.

Scene-by-scene construction is one of Wolfe’s four tools to give realism to the text. Capote tells the story by using mimesis: creating scenes and going from one scene to the other. Reading the book is like watching a film that is played before you and Capote has managed to create scenes that feel realistic and very much alive. At first we might follow the Clutters and in the next scene Capote switches the point of view over to the killers and what they are doing in the same moment. He also connects the scenes by giving details that reoccur in the next scene. The scene about Perry starts with a detail that connects him with Mr Clutter from the previous scene. “Like Mr Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a café called the Little Jewel never drank coffee” (Capote 12). This technique gives a nice flow to the text at the same time as it shows the contrasts and similarities between the characters. It raises the
excitement to know that the killers are on their way and that the Clutter’s lives are getting
closer and closer to the end. Occasionally Capote even repeats the last sentence of the
paragraph as the first sentence in the following paragraph. The paragraph on page 219 ends
with Agent Dewey saying “‘By the way, do you know what tomorrow is? Nancy Clutter’s
birthday. She would have been seventeen’” (Capote 219). Capote then changes into a new
paragraph that begins in the same way as the previous ended. “‘She would have been
seventeen.’ Perry, sleepless in the dawn hours, wondered (he later recalled) if it was true that
today was the girl’s birthday…” (Capote 219).

Dialogue is another of Wolfe’s techniques and it occurs frequently in the novel.
Capote often recreates people’s conversations, both for scenes when he was present and when
he was not. So, conversations that have been retold to him are given as much importance as
those he heard himself. Many comments originally made in an everyday situation have a large
impact on the novel when they are given a hidden meaning by putting them in another
situation. Hollowell exemplifies with the scene where Mr Clutter’s neighbour says to him “I
can’t imagine you afraid. No matter what happened, you’d talk your way out of it” (Capote
35). It is said the day before the murder and works as a premonition that has a strong impact
since the reader knows what is about to happen (Hollowell 71).

People’s inner thoughts and feelings are displayed through the omniscient
narrator and by using interior monologues. Interior monologue is one of the two techniques
Hollowell added to Wolfe’s four devices (64). The reader hears the characters thoughts and
everything that goes on inside their mind. Capote wanted to show what the people involved in
the story felt. This is a technique used in fiction and it is problematic to use it in nonfiction
since it raises questions of its accuracy. Hellmann states that an omniscient narrator is a
weakness to a nonfiction novel since it manipulates the facts (64). In interviews new
journalists did not only ask people what they did, they also asked what they felt. Thurén
believes that it is not enough to simply ask what someone feels and then recreate it as an
interior monologue. However, he does not think it is total fiction even though it gives a bad
sense of truth (Thurén 330-331).

Composite characterisation is the other device added by Hollowell (64). Capote
has admitted that he has used information in another context than he originally received it
(Hellmann 64). However, he does not seem to have created new characters by mixing features
from many existing persons.

Wolfe’s fourth device, to show details, is an important tool for Capote’s writing.
Capote has included many details in the novel and he wants the reader to be emotionally
involved in the story, as he probably was himself. Capote tells the reader about the character’s habits, their looks, gestures and what they like and dislike. We know that neither Mr Clutter nor Perry likes coffee (12), that Mr Clutter usually did not eat breakfast (7), that Perry chews aspirin because he likes the taste (52) and that Agent Dewey “enjoyed hiking across wheat fields” (146). Every character is also carefully described, no matter how unimportant part they play in the novel.

The youngest of the KBI group, Harold Nye, who was a peppy little man of thirty-four with restless, distrustful eyes and a sharp nose, chin, and mind, had been assigned what he called ‘the damned delicate business’ of interviewing the Clutter kinfolk… (Capote 81)

Harold Nye plays a small part in the book, but his external appearance and way of talking are still carefully described by Capote. Dick and Perry are some of the main characters in the book and their habits, gestures and appearance are described in many different situations so that the reader gets to know them very closely.

…two young men were sharing a booth in the Eagle Buffet, a Kansas City diner. One – narrow-faced, and with a blue cat tattooed on his right hand – had polished off several chicken-salad sandwiches and was now eyeing his companion’s meal: an untouched hamburger and a glass of root beer in which three aspirin were dissolving. (Capote 84-85)

All of the six tools given by Wolfe and Hollowell are used by Capote, except for composite characterisation. And, like Wolfe states, all of these factors contribute to making In Cold Blood as “gripping” (46) and “absorbing” (46) as it is. Also, it makes the reader “emotionally involved” (46). The many descriptions of the characters and the point of view that makes the reader experience their thoughts and inner feelings make the reader feel as if they know them. Therefore, the reader becomes emotionally involved and touched by the story.

Hellmann points to a few of the similarities between fiction and new journalism. One of them is forewords and afterwords. In fiction the purpose of the foreword and afterword are to show that it is, in fact, an invented story and to separate it from reality. However, in new journalism the intention is the opposite. The foreword and the afterword are supposed to strengthen it as a true account by showing how the story has been researched and the memories and reactions of the people involved when first reading the work (Hellmann 14). Genette states in his book Paratexts that “The most important function of the original preface, perhaps, is to provide the author’s interpretation of the text or, if you prefer, his
statement of intent” (221). Though, the function of the foreword varies and it does not always fill the same purpose (Genette 196). Genette agrees with Hellmann that the foreword in fiction is supposed to emphasise that it is in fact a fictive story and that the characters are not real (215). An author of historical works often emphasise the authenticity of the book in the foreword (Genette 206). The author can for instance indicate what sources have been used for the book. “This is typical of works of fiction that draw their subjects from history or legend, for ‘pure’ fiction in theory lacks sources, and strictly historical works indicate their sources, instead, in the detail of the text or in the notes” (Genette 211). So, novels based on historical events often state were the story originally comes from in the foreword, just like Capote has done in the foreword to In Cold Blood. In his acknowledgements Capote states that all material that is not based on his own observations is taken from official records or interviews with people directly involved in the case. He also makes sure to thank everyone that has helped him in his research and those that have provided information for his book. “I will not attempt to make a roll-call of all those Finney County citizens who, though their names do not appear in these pages, provided the author with a hospitality and friendship he can only reciprocate but never repay” (Capote no page number). Capote clearly uses his acknowledgments as a way of reassuring the reader of the content’s accuracy, just as Hellmann suggests. By thanking almost the entire county Capote shows that he has been in contact with many of the locals and performed a thorough research. He highlights the fact that he was in Holcomb, Kansas where the events took place and that he has had access to all the information surrounding the case. Capote shows his intention with the book and highlights that it is not fictive by thanking his sources, just like Genette says is common for books that are based on real events.

When these techniques, which are used in books of fiction, also are used in nonfiction it confuses the reader. It is easy to start wondering whether it is fact or if it might be invented. The next chapter will discuss this further and how a text is understood by its readers.

5.3. Author-reader contract
Hollowell states that In Cold Blood “is a work of literature because it is clearly the product of an artist’s imagination. Capote shaped the ‘facts’ and manipulated our responses to the characters and events he described” (85). As Thurén states the relationship between fiction and journalism is problematic. It is almost impossible to always be completely true in what
you write, however there is a difference between making minor mistakes and purposely stepping away from the truth (19). Thurén does not see the fact that nonfiction novels and new journalism often are classified as something in-between fiction and journalism as a good categorisation. Instead Thurén argues that it is more important to clarify the purpose of the text than to categorise it. We read it differently if it is believed to be fiction or documentary it is therefore vital that the author states how the text should be read (Thurén 22-23). When reading fiction the reader is aware that it is not true, and in academic texts opposing opinions are presented for the reader to make their own judgement. However in documentaries and new journalism the reader is not ‘warned’ that the text might not be completely true (Thurén 390).

Hansen also points to the importance of the so called author-reader contract. The contract urges the reader to position himself to the text in a way that will make the reader understand the text correctly. If it signals that it is a text of fiction you react differently to the text’s reality than if it was signalled to be a documentary. This is very important since the text is easily misunderstood if the reader does not know the nature of the text (Hansen 11). When you read a book of fiction there is no true or false, everything in the book is made up by the author and as a reader you know that the novel’s reality has nothing to do with the real world that we live in. However, a book that is claimed to be journalistic is often trusted as telling the truth and referring to something in our world. That is one of the factors that make *In Cold Blood* as problematic as a true account. Capote claims a journalistic contract with the reader when he states that he has written a true account only based on research. However, when writing in the style of fiction he confuses the reader who starts doubting the credibility of the content. The reader does not know how to interpret the text.

### 5.4 Depicting Reality

Thurén points to some of the dangers of describing reality in written documentaries. He states that a writer can be influenced by his own values when observing an event, interviewing people or if he does not question his sources. So the writer can then change information intentionally or unintentionally (Thurén 322). Another aspect of writing documentaries that could be questioned is how the material is chosen. The journalist might only include fragments of the total impression, so their selection could affect how something is portrayed in the text (Thurén 334). Direct quotes from a source can also be put in a context that provides the interpretation the writer is looking for (Thurén 324). According to Nick Rance Capote admits to a certain level of manipulation in the novel and Capote is quoted to have
said that if he uses information that he does not agree with he puts it in another context without letting the reader know (Rance 87). According to Hellmann Capote has also admitted to changing the source of his facts in the novel. Furthermore, to leave himself out of the story, even when he played a significant part in the events, also adds to the unreliability of the novel (Hellmann 64-65). Consequently, a statement made by one person in the book could in reality have been said by someone else in another context. Therefore I agree with Hellmann in the following quote:

The result is that, however factual In Cold Blood may be, Capote appears to have stretched the material in ways disturbingly close to the approximating illusions associated with realistic fiction, while continuing to claim a journalistic contract. (Hellmann 65)

Capote has also admitted that the final episode in In Cold Blood is in fact invented. He wanted to provide a good ending to the story and has therefore invented a scene where Agent Dewey meets Nancy’s friend Sue Kidwell in the cemetery (Rance 88). In journalism and documentaries the writer uses rhetoric in order to affect the reader’s emotions and attitudes. The level of abstraction is one way of doing that. When there are plenty of details, the reader becomes highly committed to the events and characters in the text. Hence, a lack of details makes the reader’s feelings less engaged. Therefore it is easy to influence the reader’s emotions with level of abstraction according to Thurén (354-355). We have already seen in chapter 5.2 that Capote uses plenty of detail in his writing. According to Wolfe it is a way of creating realism (46), however, it also manipulates the reader’s feelings (Thurén 354-355). Capote uses details both as a way of manipulating the reader’s feelings as well as making the content seem more realistic. Hollowell also points out that Capote “chose the scenes and conversations with the most powerful dramatic appeal” (71). Capote had to make a selection of all the facts he gathered. That is always the case, no matter if it is a work of fiction or fact, the material must be arranged. Capote is quoted saying “I could have added a lot of opinions [on the motives of the killers, on the psychiatric reports, etc.]. But that would have confused the issue, and indeed the book. I had to make up my mind, and move towards one view, always” (Hollowell 74). He selected the scenes that would be most noteworthy, and the rest of the event is kept a secret (Hollowell 71). However, Johnson believes that Capote has managed to keep an open mind to the end of the book and only provided facts in order for the readers to make their own moral judgment (50).
There are many more sides to the story than the one *In Cold Blood* shows. In the quote above Capote confirms that he has only told one view of the story. Hence, it is misleading to call it a true account. Capote has chosen the material that fits into his interpretation and the side he wanted to show. As Hollowell states a writer has to make a selection of the material, or the book would end up too long. However, Capote’s selection of material harms the factual content. What he writes is not always the actual truth of what happened, but a mix of real events with his own interpretation that has been shaped into a new ‘truth’. An example of where Capote tries to control the reader’s feelings is when the jury reads their verdict. However, right before they do that, two journalists are discussing the brutality of the death penalty (Capote 298-299). Additionally, in the scene following the verdict Mrs Meier hears Perry crying alone in his cell. “Crying like a child. He’d never broke down before, shown any sign of it. Well, I went to him. The door of his cell. He reached out his hand. He wanted me to hold his hand, and I did, I held his hand, and all he said was, ‘I’m embraced by shame’” (Capote 300). Capote clearly wants the reader to be emotionally affected by the verdict and to think of the brutality in it. He uses documented facts from the trial together with emotional scenes and statements in order to affect the reader emotionally.

Thurén stresses that a written documentary can inspire confidence in the author. A documentary is most of the time portrayed as factual, even if it is not, and the author uses rhetoric and stylistic techniques of writing so as to convince the reader that the content is true. The first time it is read it might be convincing, nonetheless, when it is examined closer it might be less so. In fiction and academic texts the reader is made aware that it is not the ultimate truth that is conveyed in the text (Thurén 390-391). Thurén continues that the author of journalistic or documentary texts can be more reliable by arguing and proving their statements, rather than simply telling and showing it (391). However, as shown in the next chapter, Capote strictly avoids commenting on anything in the book and only tells and shows the reader what happens. This can therefore be seen as a mistake as it affects the content’s reliability.

5.5. Authorial Silence

“Capote’s nonfiction is like his fiction in what it does not say” (Anderson 48). Anderson points out that Capote uses authorial silence in both his fiction and nonfiction. He does not comment or interpret important details, Capote is not part of the story at all and he only observes what happens (Anderson 48). However, like Booth states the author is always
present on some level, it is impossible for him to disappear completely (20). Anderson believes that Capote tells the scene however he only implies the meaning behind it and leaves the readers to figure it out for themselves (51). Just before Dick and Perry arrive at the Clutter’s farm house they stop at a service station and Perry locks himself in the men’s room.

The door to the men’s room was still bolted. He banged on it: ‘For Christsake, Perry!’ ‘In a minute.’ ‘What’s the matter? You sick?’ Perry gripped the edge of the washbasin and hauled himself to a standing position. His legs trembled; the pain in his knees made him perspire. He wiped his face with a paper towel. He unlocked the door and said, ‘OK. Let’s go.’ (Capote 53-54)

This quote is an example of how Capote tells the scene but does not explain it. We do not know why Perry has locked himself in the men’s room. It raises questions and when we do not get the answers we start making our own assumptions. It could be because Perry is under a lot of stress and nervous about the crime Dick and him are about to commit. It could also be because he has a terrible pain in his knees from his motorcycle accident a few years earlier. Maybe Capote wants the reader to assume that it is because Perry has second thoughts about the crime they have planed to commit. As I get back to further on in the analysis, Perry is portrayed favourably in the novel therefore this quote and Capote’s lack of explanation to it contributes to the favourable portrayal of Perry. Capote seems to want the reader to assume that Perry is not as bad as Dick and that Perry was talked into killing the Clutter family.

Anderson states that authorial silence makes the reader part of the action and also makes the reader work harder to understand what happens. The answers are not provided by the author but must be discovered by the reader (Anderson 51-52). However, nonfiction should be as clear as possible so that the reader does not have to question the intended meaning (Anderson 52). If the meaning is not clear it is easy for the reader to misinterpret the books content. As seen in chapter 4.2 about literary techniques, imagery and symbols can be important in works that use authorial silence. Anderson also states that Capote relies on “symbolism and the implications of concreteness to convey meaning” (50). Capote shows something to the reader instead of telling it (Anderson 50). This method forces the reader to make his or her own assumptions and only makes the novel seem more unreliable. According to Hellmann, one of the greatest mistakes made by Capote when writing In Cold Blood was his determination to keep himself completely out of the novel. The scenes that are witnessed by Capote and those that are created from second hand sources are constructed by using the same methods.
Hellmann believes that this only confuse the readers and make them doubt the novels reliability (104).

5.6. Subjectivity
According to Hollowell new journalists strive for a higher level of objectivity. They write subjectively but are open about it and clearly show their own opinions and tendencies in order to reach objectivity (Hollowell 22). However, this is not completely true of Capote. Capote is subjective but as seen in the previous chapter, he remains silent and avoids commenting on details and events in the story. Therefore, he does not even get close to admitting his own tendencies and opinions. Many critics have also pointed to the fact that Perry is given more attention in the book. Anderson is one of these critics that argue that Perry is portrayed in a way that gives him more sympathy from the reader. Capote does not openly tell us to sympathise with Perry, however he does so in a more subtle way (Anderson 77). When paying attention to this fact it is fairly obvious that Perry is portrayed in a more favourable way than Dick. When they are first introduced to us in the novel we immediately get a more emotional picture of Perry. He is shown as a sentimental man that carries all his belongings and memories around with him in a box. Perry is also portrayed as being alone without anyone that really cares for him. His bad upbringing gets plenty of attention in the book. His mother does not care for him and his sister is afraid of him and does not even want him to know where she lives. His background makes the reader understand Perry better and to become more sympathetic towards him.

After all, 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’. Look at his family! Look at what had happened there! His mother, an alcoholic, had strangled to death on her own vomit. Of her children, two sons and two daughters, only the younger girl, Barbara, had entered ordinary life, married, begun raising a family. Fern, the other daughter, jumped out of a window of a San Francisco hotel. […] And there was Jimmy, the older boy – Jimmy, who had one day driven his wife to suicide and killed himself the next. (Capote 106)

This quote wants the reader to know that it is not Perry’s own fault that he ended up the way he did. When looking at the rest of his family, he probably could not have done very much to change the course of his life. He was more or less destined to end up “not just right” (Capote 106). Perry gets a lot more attention than Dick throughout the whole book. Many long and
positive narratives about Perry are included and stories about his background that makes the reader understand him and maybe even feel sorry for him. Dick is not even close to occupying as many pages in the book as Perry does. Dick is described as “authentically tough, invulnerable, ‘totally masculine’” (Capote 15). The reader mostly gets to know Dick as a hard and unemotional man. As in this quote when he takes pleasure in hitting dogs with the car.

The car was moving. A hundred feet ahead, a dog trotted along the side of the road. Dick swerved towards it. It was an old half-dead mongrel, brittle-boned and mangy, and the impact, as it met the car, was little more than what a bird might make. But Dick was satisfied. ‘Boy!’ he said – and it was what he always said after running down a dog, which was something he did whenever the opportunity arose. ‘Boy! We sure splattered him!’ (Capote 108)

Capote does not only show how Dick kills dogs as soon as he gets the chance, he also has a sexual interest in children. However, that is something that even Dick himself is slightly ashamed of even though he tries to convince himself that it is in fact normal.

He was sorry he felt as he did about her, for his sexual interest in female children was a failing of which he was ‘sincerely ashamed’ – a secret he’d not confessed to anyone and hoped no one suspected (though he was aware that Perry has reason to), because other people might not think it ‘normal’. That, to be sure, was something he was certain he was – ‘a normal’. Seducing pubescent girls, as he had done ‘eight or nine’ times in the last several years, did not disprove of it, for if the truth were known, most real men had the same desires he had. (Capote 194-195)

Capote makes sure to show the reader that Perry does not agree with Dick’s behaviour and to constantly highlight their differences. In this quote he shows Perry’s reaction to Dick’s behaviour regarding young girls.

…he had ‘no respect for people who can’t control themselves sexually’, especially when the lack of control involved what he called ‘pervertiness’ – ‘bothering kids’, ‘queer stuff’, rape. And he thought he had made his views obvious to Dick; indeed, hadn’t they almost had a fist fight when quite recently he had prevented Dick from raping a terrified young girl? (Capote 195)

Perry is also the one that is portrayed as having second thoughts about killing the Clutter family. He constantly thinks about it and goes over every detail in his mind. Perry says that he never really thought he could do such a thing. “‘Deep down,’ Perry continued, ‘way, way rockbottom, I never thought I could do it. A thing like that.’” (Capote 106). Dick, however,
remains cold and unaffected and does not want to talk about it at all. All these quotes that portray Dick and Perry show how different they are, and how Capote tries to highlight their differences even further by showing the reader how they behave. Hollowell states that Perry resembles the protagonists in Capote’s other works and that he often focuses on the unusual and somewhat abnormal characters in his writing (75). It indicates that Capote has chosen the facts about Perry that makes him appear vulnerable and has highlighted his isolation from society so that he becomes more interesting and so that the reader is more sympathetic towards him.

Capote started writing for prison reform after having followed the case of Dick and Perry closely (Johnson 48). What he saw affected his writing and Capote also lets the reader know a bit about the other three prisoners that are on Death Row at Lansing together with Dick and Perry (Capote 303). He also provides facts and a negative depiction of the process of capital punishment in the USA. Right before the scene when Dick and Perry were executed, we read that many convicts have to wait a long time for their execution and that it even depend on luck in many cases.

In the disposition of capital cases in the United States, the median elapsed time between sentence and execution is approximately seventeen months. Recently, in Texas, an armed robber was electrocuted one month after his conviction; but in Louisiana, at the present of writing, two rapists have been waiting for a record twelve years. The variance depends a little on luck and a great deal on the extent of litigation. (Capote 323)

This quote conveys a negative view of capital punishment to the reader and therefore the entire scene of the execution is affected by this statement. Rance suggests that the title, In Cold Blood, is not only in reference to the killers, but also to the execution and of capital punishment as a whole (95). Hollowell also points out that Capote’s opinions about the cold-bloodedness of the death penalty and societies demand for it can be seen in dialogues throughout the book (74). For example he also lets Dick comment on what he thinks about the death penalty and he responds that it is all about revenge. “I’m not against it. Revenge is all it is, but what’s wrong with revenge? It’s very important” (Capote 328). So, by portraying the death penalty as something negative Capote shows his own opinions.
6. CONCLUSION

Every time I have read the novel *In Cold Blood* I have been captured by the story and how alive it feels. The fact that it should be a true account has made it even more exciting and the story has really stayed with me after finishing the book. However, I started thinking how it could be possible to write an absolutely true story and what would make it different from a story that is only *based* on a true story. In the analysis I have investigated how Capote’s style of writing has affected the content and how he depicted the story’s reality. My thesis statement, as seen in chapter 2, is that *In Cold Blood* is *not a true account because of the subjectivity and the fictional techniques used by Capote. It harms the credibility of the book to an extent that does not make In Cold Blood believable as a true account.*

As a complement to my thesis statement I asked three questions whose answers further support my thesis statement. The first question was *what narrative techniques are found in* *In Cold Blood?* I found that Capote has used almost all of the techniques Wolfe and Hollowell say creates realism in writing. Capote uses scene-by-scene construction, dialogues, details, interior monologues and an omniscient narrator in his writing. Especially the omniscient narrator is problematic to nonfiction literature since it shows what people think and feel, something that the author cannot know. People’s feelings and thoughts are difficult to portray correctly even if the person is asked what he or she felt in that particular moment since there are many other factors that might affect a witness in such a situation. To show details is a way of making the text appear realistic, however it is also a technique that controls the reader’s feelings. If the author includes plenty of details the reader gets more emotionally attached to the person or the event. These techniques that Capote has used certainly involves the reader, however, it also makes the reader question the factual content. Especially since these techniques convey a message of fiction. Capote also emphasises the truthfulness of the book in a foreword, which is often done in books based on historical events. A completely true story would state its sources in a clearer way. The fictional techniques have therefore, affected the sense of truth in the novel.

I also asked *what the problems of depicting reality in writing are* and whether *In Cold Blood is subjective or objective in its portrayal of the story and its characters?* The problem with reality, especially in documentary writing, is that the authors use rhetoric and certain techniques of writing to convince the reader that the content is true, even if it is not. Capote uses emotional scenes and dialogues together with documented facts to make the book seem more reliable. He has not been consequent when telling the reader how to interpret the text. The journalistic contract Capote claims is unclear since he has written in the style of
fiction, which gives the opposite message. He has stated that it is fact, nevertheless, it is written as if it was fiction, which only causes confusion regarding his journalistic contract. Since he also has manipulated the content of the book and his sources it makes the journalistic contract even more doubtful. Capote has not only changed in what situation facts are presented and from who we get the information, he has even invented scenes. When the facts and the content of the book have been as manipulated and arranged as it has in *In Cold Blood* it is very difficult for the reader to see through the message the author tries to convey. He controls the reader’s emotions by giving certain information in a context that will provide the feelings he is looking to produce. I do not agree with Johnson who argues that the readers can make their own judgements without their emotions and interpretation of the novel being affected by the techniques used by Capote. Furthermore, it is vital to give answers in nonfiction and not let the reader guess what is intended. This is something that Capote does not provide. He therefore forces the reader to interpret the story in their own way. It only adds further to the unreliable content. Capote could have made his intention clearer by stating his opinions and tendencies in the case and therefore also have given the readers a chance to make their own judgements and to be critical to the books contents. However, he stays silent and avoids commenting on the story. In fact he does not reveal his own presence in the book at all. Consequently, he cannot claim a higher level of objectivity either like other new journalists do. *In Cold Blood* is merely a subjective view of a true event. Perry is a clear example of Capote’s subjectivity. He is given plenty of space and attention in the book and it is clear that Capote feels for him and also wants the reader to understand him. Since Perry also resembles the protagonists in Capote’s fiction, it indicates that he has highlighted the sides Capote find most interesting with Perry. But since he does not state his tendencies it only contributes to the manipulation. It is of course nearly impossible for a writer to be completely objective, and it is not always necessary. However, I believe that when the writer sets out to write a true account, as Capote has, he should try to stay as clear and objective as possible and also show his tendencies. As it is, the reader only gets one view of the event, but it is conveyed as the only truth.

My conclusion therefore is that *In Cold Blood* is not a true account, as it is only one view of the story. The account is subjective, manipulated and confusing because of the style of writing and also because Capote tells things that he never explains so that the reader starts making her own assumptions. This has negative consequences for a nonfiction novel that is said to be a true account; it makes the factual content lose its credibility. *In Cold Blood* is therefore best read as fiction.
Bibliography


