TRUMAN CAPOTE: EVIL AND INNOCENCE

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TRUMAN CAPOTE: EVIL AND INNOCENCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The struggle between evil and innocence has been a subject of literature since man began to write down his thoughts. In almost every society there are traditional stories of how an innocent person is tempted by various attractive aspects of evil. The Bible, the Sanskrit Vedas, the Moslem Koran, as well as the scriptures of practically every ethnic group, contain many stories of this kind. This struggle between evil and innocence is frequently demonstrated in contemporary literature in the initiation stories such as those of Ernest Hemingway, James T. Farrell, and, more recently, J. D. Salinger. In the theme of initiation, the innocent person, usually a very young individual, becomes aware of some evil force in the world. He loses the innocence and idealism of youth to find it replaced by the cynicism of the mature person.

Before 1920, with the possible exception of Mark Twain, the adolescent was treated within the framework of what George Santayana referred to, in 1911, as the "genteel tradition." Santayana traced the genteel tradition back to the teachings of John Calvin as they were interpreted in
Colonial America. Santayana's term has no real definition, but it would seem to refer to the teaching of morality that developed from our country's early New England Puritanism. Beginning in the 1920's, the writing of American authors took a sharp turn away from the morals of the "genteel tradition" to a more realistic portrayal of the American scene. Books such as those by Booth Tarkington were things of the past. The more brutal and, certainly, more realistic writings of the Hemingway, Farrell, and Willa Cather vein replaced the sentimental earlier treatments. In the later works dealing with the theme of the initiation of the youth, the specific problems of young persons have been delved into and even exploited in an apparent attempt to explain in a realistic manner just what young people experience in maturing into the adult world where all their previous adolescent morals and attitudes—taught to them by their elders—suddenly do not fit in the society in which they find themselves.

Truman Capote has, since the publication of his first stories in the late 1940's, frequently used variations of the theme of initiation. Notably, the two short novels The Grass Harp and Other Voices, Other Rooms are initiation stories, but even the non-fiction work In Cold Blood may be seen as the struggle of the innocent against the evil forces.

2 Ibid., pp. 7-10.
in society. In many of the short stories this same theme appears. Capote's method is to place an innocent character in a situation in which he will be confronted with an evil force. Then the character must seek his solution. The subsequent solution and the change in the character (if there is a change) demonstrate Capote's idea of the initiation of the innocent character to evil.

Capote's works are stories of character rather than ideas, so his themes are presented through characters, and the characters are always related to their settings. One may assume that his stories give his view that people and places are closely connected. Society is, of course, made up of people in places, and people are products of their society. When a Capote character becomes involved with his society, he learns the hidden evils that exist there; and, as a result of his knowledge, he grows up. When one of Capote's characters is kept isolated, he does not learn the evil of society and retains his innocence. In Capote's works diametric opposites usually appear: there will be at least one character who is almost unbelievably good and one who is equally bad. The evil characters are those who have had social experience; they have learned the evil of society and have embraced it. These characters attempt, sometimes without being aware of their influence, to introduce the innocents to evil. These two types of characters are brought together in In Cold Blood.
Until his most recent novel, *In Cold Blood*, was published, Capote could not have been called a realist, but his treatment of the adolescent does coincide with the trend that began in the 1920's: the trend of a realistic portrayal of the problems of the young. Though his stories are often of the Gothic type—often even surrealistic—Capote's adolescents have behaved as the adolescents of real life: they are confused, belligerent, and afraid of the unknown. Both the fictional and the real youths face the same problems in learning how to react to their world as they develop rapidly into adulthood. Capote's is a world of unreality within a framework of reality in which his characters must deal not only with the problems of an ordinary person, but also with the morbid situations that his Gothic settings cause. Also, the characters are frequently plagued by creatures which appear only in their minds. Their dream worlds become more hellish than their actual worlds. Their problems seem to be disassociated from the world of the average person, but their reactions to the problems are true to life.

Apparently much of Capote's material comes from his own background; however, proving this point is difficult because biographical information about him is difficult to verify. There are many conflicting reports about his early years. However, the following information appears to be accurate, or, at least, it is repeated in several magazine articles and in *Current Biography, 1951*. Capote was born Truman
Strekfus Persons in New Orleans, Louisiana, on September 30, 1924. As a child, following his parents' divorce, he lived in a "terribly isolated place" near New Orleans where a large group of his cousins also lived. The "isolated place," Flaquemine, Louisiana, was equipped with a large library where Capote read widely and learned to admire Willa Cather, Flaubert, and Proust. He also spent several summers with an aunt in Monroeville, Alabama, where he became a childhood acquaintance of Harper Lee. Capote's family was not literary, and they could not understand the imaginative boy's interest in literature. When, at the age of twelve, he published his first short story, they were amazed. They were also shocked because at least four of the citizens of Flaquemine were readily recognizable; a definite problem arose over the incident. Capote was never close to his family, with the exception of an older female cousin who cared for him as a small child. He seldom had playmates near his own age; apparently he spent a very lonely childhood.

Because of their lack of control over the boy, Capote's family sent him to a military school where "he surprised everyone by staying a whole year and winning a prize for drilling." At the age of fifteen, he spent five months tap dancing on a pleasure boat on the Mississippi River. Capote, who took his last name from his Cuban stepfather, was on his

own. He finally joined his mother and stepfather at Millbrook, Connecticut, where he attended Greenwich High School. At Greenwich, under the tutelage of Miss Catherine Wood of the English faculty, Capote's writing talent, which had bloomed earlier, further developed. He left school at the age of seventeen, never to finish high school.

At seventeen, trying to support himself in New York City, Capote worked on The New Yorker. He was first employed in the accounting department until the discovery that he could hardly add and subtract was made; then he became a sketch writer. He amused himself by painting imaginative flowers on glass, which he later sold at a tidy profit. When he was eighteen, Capote's short story, "Miriam," was published and won for him an O. Henry Memorial award, an achievement that he has since repeated. "Miriam" also won him a contract with Random House Publishers for the forthcoming Other Voices, Other Rooms. Capote has since that time published, infrequently, short stories, novels, and some non-fiction sketches which were published first in The New Yorker and later combined into the collection entitled Local Color.

The isolation of Capote's own youth may perhaps be mirrored in The Grass Harp and Other Voices, Other Rooms. The young writer in New York appears in Breakfast at Tiffany's. Many of the short stories are based on people and places that Capote could have seen, and probably did see.
The style of his fiction is similar to that used in Local Color and The Muses Are Heard, both non-fiction pieces about real people in real places. Knowing that Capote has had the opportunity to experience the things that he writes of in his fiction and that the mode of expression is similar in both the fiction and the non-fiction work, one should conclude that Capote's strange background probably gave him most of the material that appears in his stories.

Capote has said little about the sources of his earlier work, but he has often commented on his methods of writing. In an interview shortly before the publication of the short story collection, A Tree of Night, Capote remarked, "All I want to do is tell a story, and sometimes it's best to choose a symbol. I wouldn't know a Freudian symbol as such if you showed it to me." Largely self-educated, Capote has professed ignorance of the techniques and theories of writing in the past, but more recently, since In Cold Blood's publication, he talks rather freely about the way he tries to present his material. Shortly after the publication of In Cold Blood, he explained how he "trained" to write what he calls the "non-fiction novel." Capote tells how he spent hours "just listening" while someone read to him. Then he would go to a quiet place and try to duplicate on paper the material that he had heard. In this way he learned to

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interview people without using a notebook or tape recorder.\textsuperscript{5} Later, speaking of the technique of the motion picture production of \textit{In Cold Blood}, Capote referred to the shifting of scenes from Perry Smith to Dick Hickock to the Clutter family as "the contrapuntal technique I used in writing the book."\textsuperscript{6} Capote has grown as a writer in the approximately twenty years of his career and has acquired an almost brash confidence in his own ability—a confidence that allows him to make public statements about his value as a writer. Such a statement is his avowal that \textit{In Cold Blood} will become a classic.\textsuperscript{7}

Critics have not always agreed with Capote, or with each other, as to his artistry. Early in his career he was criticized for having a style that was "too easy."\textsuperscript{8} Other criticisms have been based on an idea that his work is not realistic. Some critics have said that he has nothing new to say. More specifically, the 1952 stage production of \textit{The Grass Harp} was treated rather unkindly by the critics. One writer felt that the play is trivial, ostentatious, and

\textsuperscript{5}Jane Howard, "How the 'Smart Rascal' Brought It Off," \textit{Life}, LX (January 7, 1966), 71.

\textsuperscript{6}Truman Capote, "Truman Capote Reports on the Filming of \textit{In Cold Blood}," \textit{The Saturday Evening Post}, CCXLI (January 13, 1968), 65.

\textsuperscript{7}Howard, p. 71.

pretentious—a failure because of its lack of sincerity. Another critic said that the play is just silly. However, the novel *The Grass Harp* was seen by Oliver La Farge as a good example of what he calls "sunlit Gothic." He praises Capote's use of old themes and techniques:

Mr. Capote makes the assemblage of the assorted five—three old, two young, three male, two female, four white, one Negro—quite reasonable. Once his story is rolling, its progress has the character of inevitability, which, since this is comedy, is not marred by his occasional, quite shameless use of coincidence.

*Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* also received adverse criticism. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was said to "create a world of passive acceptance in which we are rendered incapable of thinking anybody responsible for his behavior in any department." *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was seen as a piece of "good writing," but its characterization is weak because "it gives us the outline without the

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9 Eric Bentley, "On Capote's Grass Harp," *The New Republic*, CXXVI (April 14, 1952), 22: "At first blush Mr. Capote's play is simply ridiculous: it is about people living in trees . . . . The theme of 'a search for one's real self' becomes trite because Capote 'has not made it his own.'"

10 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," *The Nation*, CLXXIV (April 12, 1952), 353: The plot of five people's escape from their crass Southern families to go live in trees is "no sillier than the plot of *As You Like It,*" but *The Grass Harp* is felt to be a failure because Capote is of lesser genius than Shakespeare.


woman, a 'character,' not a person." 13 But most of the critics who praised the early novels were overly enthusiastic about such things as Capote's "truthful intensity" and his not "sinking into romanticism or departing from any of the desired standards of taste and maturity." 14 Surprisingly few critics have disagreed with Capote's evaluation of his "new invention," the non-fiction novel. In Cold Blood, while it is not strictly a new form, is sufficiently popular and, more important, artistically sound to place Capote among the most important contemporary writers.

Capote's themes of the innocent character who is confronted with evil and the evil character--a product of society--who tries to initiate the innocent, are brought together in In Cold Blood. Since the innocent characters in the early novels are frequently adolescents, and since the more mature innocents, like Perry of In Cold Blood, have the childish innocence of the adolescent, Anna Freud's discussion of the adolescent appears to describe Capote's innocents:

Adolescents are excessively egoistic, regarding themselves as the centre of the universe and the sole object of interest, and yet at no time in later life are they capable of so much self-sacrifice and devotion. They form the most passionate love-relations, only to break them off as abruptly as they began them. On the one hand they throw themselves enthusiastically


into the life of the community and, on the other, they have an over-powering longing for solitude. They oscillate between blind submission to some self-chosen leader and defiant rebellion against any and every authority. They are selfish and materially-minded and at the same time full of lofty idealism. They are ascetic but will suddenly plunge into instinctual indulgence of the most primitive character. At times their behavior to other people is rough and inconsiderate, yet they themselves are extremely touchy. Their moods veer between light-hearted optimism and blackest pessimism. Sometimes they will work with indefatigable enthusiasm, and at other times they are sluggish and apathetic.15

This definition of adolescence is accepted by most authorities today, yet it agrees with the Romantic concept of youth that Wordsworth expressed in 1804. His idealism, his passionate zest for life, and his sincere devotion to loved ones are qualities like those of Wordsworth's Youth in "Ode, Intimations of Immortality."

The fifth stanza of Wordsworth's poem, lines sixty-five through seventy-eight, explains the Romantic view of the young as being innocent.

But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy
But he
Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Wordsworth's poem indicates that man becomes evil through his contact with society. The "growing Boy" retains his innocence; the "youth, who daily further from the east must travel," is still an innocent, but the man loses the last remnants of the "clouds of glory" in the "light of common day" or contact with society. In Capote's stories some of the innocent characters are not adolescents, but they have managed to avoid contact with adult society in other ways.

The innocent in Capote's works is one who has not encountered evil or has not recognized the evil in society. The innocent, then, remains isolated from society. The Capote characters who are past the adolescent stage of development but who manage to avoid contact with society have three ways of doing this: they escape into a dream world (a creation of the mind), they manage physically to escape the confines of society, or they reject society or the evil in society. These are the same escape devices that the adolescents use. Characters who use these devices may be seen in a number of Capote's stories. These characters will be explored in Chapter II, where they may be recognized as those ignorant of society's evils and, therefore, innocent; or they will be seen as those who escape society or reject the evil that they have learned of. In either case these characters are the innocents as Truman Capote sees them.
Innocence may be thought of in this study as simply a lack of knowledge of evil or of the values of the adult world. Chapter II will deal with the innocent characters and how they come to know the adult world and the evil that dwells in society. Chapter III will explore the evil characters and the evil that exists in the mind of the adolescent. Chapter IV will conclude the study of Capote's view of evil and innocence with the non-fiction work *In Cold Blood*, which most clearly reveals how Capote sees evil and its relationship to man. A careful reading of Capote should yield the following: innocence is overcome by the evil found throughout the world; and evil comes in many forms—in simple awareness, initiation to crime, recognition of sex drives and deviations, and the discovery of insanity and all its related "oddness." The basic difference between Capote and some of the other writers who have used the theme of initiation is that Capote's characters are initiated, not always to reality, but to an evil almost completely dis-associated with reality. His is a world of fantasy which sometimes bears no resemblance to the world as most people know it.
CHAPTER II

A STUDY OF SOME OF THE INNOCENT CHARACTERS IN CAPOTE'S WORKS

There are two types of innocent characters in the works of Truman Capote. One of these character types is the adolescent or pre-adolescent child who simply has not yet, knowingly, encountered evil. The second type is the character who has knowledge of evil but rejects the existence of evil in society. There are more characters who reject evil than who have no knowledge of evil. Each of the characters, in his own way, gains a knowledge of some of the evils spawned by society, and each reacts to the evil--either by acceptance of it or by a further rejection of the concept of evil in his life and in his society.

The completely naive youngster is typified by two of the characters in Capote novels, Joel Harrison Knox of Other Voices, Other Rooms, and Collin Talbo Fenwick of The Grass Harp. There are fewer examples of this type than of those who reject evil. Both these boys share many of the characteristics of the early stages of adolescent behavioral development, but the evils they encounter and their solutions to their problems are quite different. Joel and Collin are alike in that both are highly imaginative boys, who, in
flights of fantasy, retreat into their own dream worlds, a kind of retreat not atypical of the adolescent. Both are estranged from their immediate families and both are small for their ages—factors which cause them to feel unloved, perhaps even more than the average adolescent boy. To each, Collin and Joel, the kitchen represents a refuge from the world—a real refuge as opposed to the dream worlds which they create. Both these boys fear and respect and admire tomboyish young girls and women who possess masculine traits. This fear of masculine women is connected in one way or another with the adolescent fear of and attraction to sex. In the course of the novels, both boys try to escape from the place where they live to an ideal world which they have conceived in their daydreams. At the end of both The Grass Harp and Other Voices, Other Rooms, the protagonists have gained knowledge of that which is considered evil, and both work out some kind of a solution. In each case, the most important thing each boy learns is himself.

Collin Fenwick and Joel Knox both have a common escape mechanism that they use when anything happens to upset their world or their concept of what the world should be. They daydream. This facility for escape is more highly developed in Joel than in Collin, who is slightly older, but both possess it. Collin's imaginary world is turned into a physical escape when he and four others go to the treehouse. In other flights of fantasy, Collin sees himself as a passenger
in the Alfa-Romeo roadster that the reckless, eighteen-year-old Riley Henderson drives wildly around the countryside; this illusion becomes a reality. He also sees himself as the lover of Maude Riordan, the object of his dreams who later becomes Riley's wife. To Collin, "No matter what passions compose them, all private worlds are good, they are never vulgar places. . . ."¹

Joel's more specifically delineated dream world is his "secret room" where all "his friends" exist just for him.

They were all there, including Mr. Mystery, who wore a crimson cape, a plumed Spanish hat, a glittery monocle, and had all his teeth made of solid gold: an elegant gentleman though given to talking tough from the side of his mouth, and an artist, a great magician: he played the vaudeville downtown in New Orleans twice a year, and did all kinds of eerie tricks. This is how they got to be such buddies. One time he picked Joel from the audience, brought him up on the stage, and pulled a whole basketful of cotton candy clean out of his ears; thereafter, next to little Annie Rose Kuppermann, Mr. Mystery was the most welcome visitor to the other room. Annie Rose was the cutest thing you ever saw. She had jet black hair and a real permanent wave. Her mother kept her dressed in snow white on Sundays and all clear down to her socks. In real life, Annie Rose was too stuck up and sassy to even tell him the time of day, but here in the far-away room her cute little voice jingled on and on: "I love you, Joel. I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck." And there was someone else who rarely failed to show up, though seldom appearing as the same person twice; that is, he came in various costumes and disguises,

sometimes as a circus strongman, sometimes as a big swell millionaire, but always his name was Edward R. Sansom [Joel's father].

Joel's room becomes such a protective shield that its walls cannot be penetrated even by Cousin Amy's whining and shrieking or by Cousin Randolph's sweet talk.

By the use of daydreams or flights of fantasy, Collin and Joel further combat the growing awareness of their roles in society—-they manage to escape evil and reality and maturity. Perhaps a factor which contributes to the reliance of Collin and Joel upon their daydreams is that both boys have been separated from their parents. Collin's parents are both dead. Collin's mother died first, and his father's reaction, tearing off all his clothes and running naked into the yard, deeply impressed the boy, who felt that his parents must have loved each other very much. His father died in an automobile accident a week later, following Collin's rejection of the father, a rejection which later resulted in a feeling of guilt on the part of the son.

Joel's parents have been divorced for several years, and, upon the death of his mother, Joel goes to Skulley's Landing to seek his father, only to find his father a helpless, speechless invalid. Without families, both boys feel a peculiar absence of love, a void which each tries to fill by

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choosing some member of the family with whom he lives as an object of love.

Collin and Joel are troubled by their small stature. Collin, in particular, feels, at the age of fourteen, that he will never be a normal-sized person. His fears are somewhat alleviated when, at sixteen, through the efforts of Catherine Creek, who "stretched" him on the kitchen table, he reaches the normal height of five feet, seven inches. The reader never sees a development of this kind in Joel because he is thirteen and still small when Other Voices, Other Rooms ends. Joel's size is what attracts the carnival dwarf, Miss Wisteria, who wants to have an affair with him. Joel, beginning to recognize the sordid side of life, realizes that he cannot "give her what she wants." The boys' size is not noticed when they take refuge in their favorite hideaway in the world of reality, the kitchen. The kitchens in Other Voices, Other Rooms and The Grass Harp, as in the admittedly autobiographical "A Christmas Memory," become like Tennyson's "bower," a place where one can be isolated and protected from the world. The delicious food is described in great detail; and the people, smells, and sounds of the kitchen constitute in themselves something of the dream world that is so important to Collin and Joel. When the cook, as matriarch over this refuge, leaves, the bower is destroyed and the illusion
is forever shattered, leaving only "the wind in the stove and winter in the kitchen. . . ."³

As most adolescents do, Joel and Collin fear sexual experiences, or at least they are fearful of their own performances in sexual experiences. Even so, each must experiment in his own way. Collin's repulsion at the idea of sex appears when that "hateful thing" Dr. Morris Ritz says,

"So you're sixteen," he said, winking first one, then the other of his sassy eyes. "And throwing it around, huh? Make the old lady take you next time she goes to Chicago. Plenty of good stuff there to throw it at." He snapped his fingers and jiggled his razzle-dazzle, dagger-sharp shoes as though keeping time to some vaudeville tune.⁴

Collin's reaction is one of disgust with the doctor, and he wonders what kind of doctor Morris Ritz is. Ritz's representation of sex appears to be evil to Collin. Collin admires Riley Henderson but is ashamed of Riley's reputation with girls; he is ashamed but at the same time admires Riley's prowess with the opposite sex. The moment that the two boys first become friends,

Riley unbuttoned his fly and began to flood them [a bed of ants]; I don't know that it was funny, but I laughed to keep him company. Naturally I was insulted when he switched around and peed on my shoe. I thought it meant he had no respect for me. I said to him why would he want to do a thing like that? Don't you know a joke? he said, and threw a hugging arm around my shoulder.⁵

⁴Ibid., p. 25.
⁵Ibid., p. 80.
This incident furthers Collin's fear and repulsion at sex and bawdiness; yet it also shows his growing acceptance of lewdness. Collin sees an invasion of privacy in the scene in which Big Eddie Stover gives the jailed gypsy boy a quarter to "let down his pants." Though Collin is amazed "by the size of it" and is interested, he seems to think the incident repulsive. Collin's is the normal adolescent fear of masturbation that is taught by adults:

There are two things that will drive a boy crazy (according to Mr. Hand, who caught me smoking in the lavatory at school) and I'd given up one of them, cigarettes, two years before; not because I thought it would make me crazy, but because I thought it was imperiling my growth.  

Collin, apparently through practice, has learned that what he has been told about masturbation is not true; he is not crazy and obviously he has not given it up.

Joel is introduced to sex in the form of homosexuality by Cousin Randolph. Early in Other Voices, Other Rooms, it is evident that Randolph is homosexual. His wearing of women's clothes, his holding hands with his attractive younger cousin, and his constant badgering of the women around him, along with his eventual soul-searching confession of his love for the boxer Pepe Alvarez, all prove conclusively that Randolph can have feelings only for other males—if he can have feelings for anyone else at all. Joel, rejected by the tomboyish Idabel and by Zoo, the Negro cook,

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and afraid of the dwarf, Miss Wisteria, begins to succumb to
the "charms" of Randolph, who really has no feelings for
Joel, only pity for himself and his aborted affair with
Alvarez. Joel's illness and his need for love drive him to
Randolph. Because Randolph compliments him, Joel submits to
the hand-holding episode while Amy plays the pianola. Then,
in the throes of pneumonia, Joel, partly out of gratefulness
for Randolph's attention and partly out of loneliness (he
felt that Idabel had deserted him), wants to love Randolph:

So, sometimes he came near to speaking out
his love for him; but it was unsafe ever to let
anyone guess the extent of your feelings or
knowledge. . . .  

Joel discovers the evil that attacks everyone who is lonely.
Yet Joel claims to have discovered himself in his lonely
introspection. "I am me. I am Joel, we are the same people."

Only minutes later,

. . . Joel realized then the truth; he saw how
helpless Randolph was: more paralyzed than
Mr. Sansom, more childlike than Miss Wisteria,
what else could he do, once outside and alone,
but describe a circle, the zero to his nothing-
ness? . . . he knew who he [Joel] was, he knew
that he was strong.  

Though Joel professes strength and self-realization, the
reader must decide what he has learned of himself because
Other Voices, Other Rooms ends in a most ambiguous way.
Joel is faced with the choice of leaving the Landing or

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7 Capote, Other Voices, Other Rooms, p. 211.
8 Ibid., p. 227.
remaining as Randolph's companion:

His mind was absolutely clear. He was like a camera waiting for its subject to enter focus. The wall yellowed in the meticulous setting of the October sun, and the windows were ripples mirrors of cold, seasonal color. Beyond one, someone was watching him. All of him was dumb except his eyes. They knew. And it was Randolph's window. Gradually the blinding sunset drained from the glass, darkened, and it was as if snow were falling there, flakes shaping snow-eyes, hair: a face trembled like a white beautiful moth, smiled. She beckoned to him, shining and silver, and he knew he must go: unafraid, not hesitating, he paused only at the garden's edge where as though he'd forgotten something, he stopped and looked back at the bloomless, descending blue, at the boy he had left behind.9

Did Joel leave or stay in that den of sin and evil, the Landing? Most readers are never sure whether Joel's solution was to run away or, out of pity for Randolph and a personal desire "never to hurt anyone again," stay and become Randolph's homosexual partner.10

Joel's enemy and/or friend is Idabel Thompkins, who, at twelve years of age, wants to be a boy more than anything else. In his desire to be loved and to have friends, Joel is drawn to her. She is also representative of the fearless strength that Joel feels is an extremely masculine trait that he would like to possess. At the same time Joel fears

9Ibid., p. 231.

10According to John W. Aldridge in "Capote and Buechner" in his After the Lost Generation, Joel stayed. Paul Levine in his article "Truman Capote: The Revelation of the Broken Image" makes a point of not deciding the ending of Other Voices, Other Rooms.
Idabel's strength and ill temper, for she may (and often does) turn on him. Idabel, though younger, represents a stage of masculine development to which Joel begins to realize that he must progress. Still, Idabel reminds him of a traumatic part of his past when the tomboy who lived down the block daily stripped him of his trousers and deposited them high in the nearest tree. According to John W. Aldridge, the incident during which Idabel kills the snake that, in Joel's troubled mind has Mr. Sansom's eyes, is the point at which Joel loses the last vestiges of his masculinity.\(^{11}\)

The next scene which contains both Idabel and Joel is, Aldridge says, merely added fuel to the already consuming flame that has destroyed Joel's chance at achieving manhood. This is the scene in which Joel and Idabel discover the Negro couple making love. Joel is touched. To him, "the lovers epitomize sexual passion at its purest, the final triumph over loneliness and isolation." However, Idabel fails to respond to Joel's own desire for masculinity.\(^{12}\) Joel's only recourse is to turn to the homosexual love of Randolph.

Collin Fenwick of *The Grass Harp* fears cousin Verena for the same reasons that Joel fears Idabel. Verena's masculinity frightens Collin because he realizes that masculinity is misplaced in a woman. However, Collin's

\(^{11}\)Aldridge, p. 210. \(^{12}\)Ibid., pp. 211-212.
problem is solved with the "softening" of Verena, whereas Joel does not find this solution; he never sees Idabel after the night of the carnival.

The evil that Collin discovers is that of hypocrisy. He finds out, at the age of sixteen, that people are not always what they seem to be. His late discovery of hypocrisy may be attributed to the sheltered life he led as a preadolescent. Dolly and Catherine helped to keep worldly knowledge from Collin. Of course, he picked up some "street education" but not to the extent that a loner like Riley Henderson had. For example, Collin had to learn accidentally from Riley, to his shame and dismay, what Shadows (contraceptives) were. Collin learned in rapid succession the following facts which increased his awareness of hypocrisy: (1) he, Dolly, and Catherine were of no use to Verena, though she had pretended that they were; (2) just because a man has the title of "doctor," he is not necessarily a good, upright person; (3) a minister and his wife are not always the voices of God's authority; (4) sometimes the people that society frowns on are the best people when friends are needed; and (5) sometimes a person must misrepresent himself to do the most good for others. After Dolly's death, Collin has a chance to develop some of the qualities he has learned from adults:

I hung around Phil's Cafe winning free beers on the pinball machine; it was illegal to serve me beer, but Phil had it on his mind that someday
I would inherit Verena's money and maybe set him up in the hotel business. I slicked my hair with brilliantine and chased off to dances in other towns, shined flashlights and threw pebbles at girls' windows late at night. I knew a Negro in the country who sold a brand of gin called Yellow Devil. I courted anyone who owned a car.

Because I didn't want to spend a waking moment in the Talbo house. It was too thick with air that didn't move.13

Collin's solution is to live with the real world and to reconcile himself to hypocrisy as a part of adult life.

The most important common factor between Joel and Collin is that both grow toward maturity; both think they come to know themselves, and both learn that the evil in the world is a part of life that must be coped with. Both young men enter the stories with the naivete of the child, but both, through their increasing contact with society, are forced to acquire some of the veneer of the adult, though Aldridge says Joel regresses rather than develops. They learn to use untruths to their best advantage. They both recognize the bad in man but are able, in part, to reconcile this evil as they come to know it as an essential element in the scheme of society. Collin learns that escape is not the answer. Joel, in Levine's view, finds that the worlds of his dreams and of reality merge into one long, bad dream, but the dream is an answer to his search for himself. He resigns himself to the dream-like life of the Landing. Collin's solution is to

grow up and study law, using what he had learned of falsity from adults.

Other characters from Capote's works who discover the evils of society are found in the short stories, particularly in the collection entitled *A Tree of Night*. Sylvia, of "Master Misery," tries to escape from the world; and to support herself, she sells her dreams to "Master Misery." She discovers that evil is not in the outside world, which is represented by her friend, Estelle, and the store-window Santa Clauses. The evil is inside Sylvia. She makes this discovery when she realizes that Master Misery is himself a bogey man that "all mothers tell their kids about," a force "outside the self." By being deprived of her dreams, Sylvia "is deprived finally of her own self." Sylvia's discovery is somewhat like Joel's, who discovers the propensity for homosexuality within himself. She learns that, at least for herself, all evil comes from within. She destroys herself.

Vincent, the main character of "The Headless Hawk," meets a girl who is a strange combination of the thoroughly evil person and the ingenue, and through her, he slides into a private hell of depravity and self-realization. The girl,

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D. J., leaves with Vincent, an art dealer, the portrait of a headless hawk which mysteriously makes him look within himself. Through D. J., Vincent learns about Mr. Destronelli, "the executioner in each of us." In D. J., Vincent sees "the grotesque reflection of his own broken image." The girl causes Vincent to see himself with the "old man" of his own future and his fear "riding his back" to destruction. Vincent is destroyed by the fear of inherent guilt which he feels is within himself.

Kay, the innocent of "A Tree of Night," also confronts a nameless evil when she meets two side-show performers on a train late at night. Kay appears at first to be a worldly young lady. She smokes and confesses to having drunk alcohol on a few occasions, though she does not like to drink. However, Kay's veneer of apparent worldliness is soon broken, and the reader sees her as a member of a secluded society—the college campus. She does not know how to cope with uneducated people like the fortune-teller and the deaf mute whom she finds herself with. Kay is returning to college from a funeral and is already in a state of mental unrest when she learns that the deaf-mute is called Lazarus and that his stunt in the carnival is to be buried alive. He is later dug up, to emerge from the grave like Lazarus back from the dead. Lazarus's "vapid face" and his obvious

16 Levine, p. 607.
interest in her have a hypnotic and yet an unnerving effect on her. She thinks of the stories told to her by "aunts, cooks, strangers--each eager to spin a tale or teach a rhyme of spooks and death, omens, spirits, demons." Lazarus becomes "the bogey man of every childhood, that formless embodiment of every formless fear." Kay finds in herself the fear that comes from the feeling of guilt in every person. The fear of one's self is, perhaps, the greatest evil that one can discover.

Ottilie of "House of Flowers," though she is a prostitute, is another example of the perfect innocent. She has no conception that her profession falls under the Judeo-Christian concept of evil. She is an orphaned resident of Port-au-Prince, though she was reared in the freer society of the mountains, where she was sexually initiated by the three sons of the family with whom she lived. She marries and discovers evil in the person of her husband's grandmother. In the house of prostitution where she worked in Port-au-Prince, she lived only for fun. The fun ends when, after her marriage, the jealous grandmother tries to kill Ottilie. She discovers the plan and reverses the spell, which, in some supernatural way, kills Old Bonaparte, the grandmother. In this story the realization of evil works for the good.

not the ill of the central character. Ottilie's life is saved when she learns how to make evil work for her. However, her discovery, like Eve's, leads her to trick Royal, her husband, by spending the day with the other prostitutes from the "House of Flowers" while he thinks she is tied to the tree where he left her for punishment. Royal's Eden will be destroyed just as Adam's was.

The narrator in "A Christmas Memory" learns about an evil that exists in the world beyond his control. Like Joel and Collin, he lives with distant relatives and is befriended by the matriarch of the kitchen. When he and his "friend" get drunk on the whiskey left over from the Christmas fruitcakes, "Those who Know Best" destroy the most beautiful thing in Buddy's life, his relationship with his older cousin, his "friend." The evil that comes from good intentions is perhaps the most insidious of all, and that is the evil to which Buddy becomes initiated in "A Christmas Memory."

Each of the characters discussed comes to the story with the naive innocence of a child. Within the story each gains some knowledge of an evil, usually an evil that dwells inside him. The discovery of this evil, as we have seen, may either strengthen the character for his own environment, as in the case of Joel and Collin, or it may destroy the character, as in the case of Sylvia and Vincent.
In addition to the uninitiated innocents, there are some characters in Capote's works who are not at all naive; yet, these characters refuse to recognize the evil that they encounter. By using various escape mechanisms, they manage to avoid admitting, even to themselves, that there is anything bad in the society of man. Of course, there are times when the evil does creep into the scope of their recognition, but they seem to reconcile this knowledge for a time. Total recognition of evil is destruction for this type of Capote character.

Perhaps the most complete escapist in Capote's works is Holliday Golightly of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Holly, born Lulamoe Barnes, was the orphaned child bride of one Doc Golightly of Tulip, Texas. Holly, who loved only her brother Fred, fled Texas for California, where she lost her Texas accent. When she arrives in New York, at about the age of eighteen, she lives on an income of powder room tips given her by rich "friends." Holly never thought of herself as a prostitute because she convinced herself that she really loved her eleven lovers at the time that she slept with them. Her movie-agent friend O. J. Berman described her as "a real phony" because "She believes all this crap she believes."

Holly's only real problem is that she has never found a place to belong. She is a wild thing. She compares herself to an injured hawk that Doc caught and nursed to health, a hawk which later flew away. Holly must continually fly until she
finds her own "perch." At the end of the book, she has continued to fly by going to South America, never to be heard from by her New York friends again. Holly is not a truly believable character because she is too real a phony. It is hard to imagine someone who could believe the things that she believes, someone who could act as she usually does, someone who could live by her standards. However, Holly is consistent in character. When offered the chance to change her manner of life toward the end of the story, she refuses. She deserts the only living thing that belongs to her, her cat, and again takes flight. (The movie version of Breakfast at Tiffany's changed the ending and thus changed the character of Holly, making her inconsistent—a phony phony rather than a real phony.)

The other major character of Breakfast at Tiffany's is the speaker, whom Holly calls Fred, though his real name is not given. He is a small-statured, unpublished writer who lives in the same brownstone apartment house as Holly. The resemblance between this narrator, who seems willing to have a merely Platonic relationship with Holly, and the fledgling writer Truman Capote is rather striking. "Fred" is a more believable character than Holly in that he demonstrates more compassion and understanding, and he seems to have found some sense of place in the world. He also has a more concrete sense of values than Holly, who, when "Fred" says that people
can get used to anything, says "Anybody that does, they might as well be dead."\textsuperscript{19}

The theme of \textit{Breakfast at Tiffany's} is found in Holly's statement, "Never love a wild thing. . . ." Wild things, free spirits, are not to be caged--either with bars or with affection. They must seek their own confinement or continue to wander until they find peace in life or in death, which Holly calls the "fat lady." As a novel of ideas, \textit{Breakfast at Tiffany's} is weak because it does not offer enough evidence to support its main idea; it does not rule out the possibility of wild things being tamed by forced confinement. As a novel of character, \textit{Breakfast at Tiffany's} is sentimental. Holly, the main character, does not allow her feelings for anyone or anything to show, yet we are asked to pity her as the narrator does. The cat incident, when Holly pushes Cat out into the rain and abandons him, gives the reader a chance to feel sorry for her. Holly regrets her actions a few moments later but is unable to find Cat, so she just flies away to South America. Holly may be a real phony, but her actions certainly place her among that group of characters who simply try to ignore the evil in themselves and in the world around them.

Dolly Talbo and Judge Cool, both characters in \textit{The Grass Harp}, avoid facing the reality of evil in their own

way. Dolly, who has her own refuge of the pink bedroom, makes herself feel useful by selling a homemade remedy which she learned from gypsies and by keeping house for her sister Verena. Dolly avoids evil in many ways. She has the "grass harp"—"a field of high Indian grass that changes color with the seasons . . . the autumn winds strum on its dry leaves sighing human music, a harp of voices"—which tells her that life is beautiful. She has the sheltered existence of one who never has to make decisions, and she has the facility of the sheltered that enables her always to see the good in other people. She does not wish harm to come to the Reverend and Mrs. Buster, even though she "accidentally" hits Mrs. Buster on the head with a Mason jar. Though the minister and his wife are obviously bent on self-aggrandizement, Dolly thinks that they want to help her. She thinks that Verena is good to her until the time when she is told that she, Catherine Creek, and Collin have long been a burden for her younger sister. Dolly is slow-witted, and sometimes her built-in escape mechanism fails her. She becomes temporarily disoriented when she has her first real argument with Verena and, for a few moments, when the Busters and the Sheriff try to get her to come down from the treehouse. Yet, in retrospect, she always manages to see the good in these people.

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20 Capote, The Grass Harp, pp. 3-4.
Judge Charles Cool is a man to whom life has been cruel. His wife died, leaving him with two sons who have little affection for him. He has to live as a guest in his own house, which has been divided into two apartments by his sons' wives. He has no job because his post as judge was filled when he took his wife on a trip to Europe, where she died. The local dishonest politicians no longer wanted an honest man like Charles Cool around. So the judge is left, "a fine-looking man dressed in narrowcut suits with a black silk band sewn around his sleeve and a Cherokee rose in his buttonhole . . . with nothing to do except go to the post office or stop in the bank."²¹ Yet Judge Cool, defender of the rights of the downtrodden, escapes the world by writing letters to a thirteen-year-old Alaskan girl and by proposing marriage to Dolly Talbo. The Judge borrows something of Dolly's innocence and begins to see life differently. After her death, though because of the lessons he learned from her, the Judge leaves the house of his sons to take a room at a boarding house. He has learned to hold no grudges against anyone, to forget the past. He has also learned to seek his own kind of freedom. With Collin's help he even finds Dolly's grass harp, which sings to him the songs of the past and keeps alive the memory of Dolly Talbo, the only character of The Grass Harp who remains innocent.

²¹Ibid., p. 58.
Amy Skully Sansom, the wife of Joel's father in Other Voices, Other Rooms, has seen evil in its many forms. She has recognized Randolph for what he is. She knows of his homosexuality and that he shot Ed Sansom. She knows that Joel is falling into Randolph's clutches; yet she does nothing to prevent Joel's fall. She allows herself to be intimidated by Randolph and Zoo Fever. Why? Amy has found her release valve. She has found her place, her role in society. Amy's escape is in the playing of the pianola, which is really a retreat into the past grandeur of Skully's Landing when grand parties were held there. Amy can further avoid recognition of evil simply by lapsing into some reverie of the Landing's history. When Aunt Ellen comes to take Joel away, she helps Randolph prevent the removal by giving an alibi for his and Joel's absence. But she hardly realizes what she has done because Ellen has told her of a place where Skully relics can be sold. The money is to be used to help Amy leave the prison from which she really does not want to escape—the Landing. Amy's planned escape is as much a dream world as Joel's "secret room." Her position in her world is as false as the world of the Landing. She has become the perpetual nurse of Ed Sansom. Amy is one of those persons who needs to be needed. She wants to sacrifice herself for others. Taking care of Sansom provides the outlet for this desire. So, while Amy knows about the evil that dwells at the Landing, she does nothing about it--she fails to recognize.
the evil as evil. She is probably insane by the standards of the "normal" world.

There is one character who is not innocent, nor does he reject evil in himself. However, he refuses to see the evil about him. This character is Riley Henderson of The Grass Harp. Riley's mother, the wife of a deceased missionary, had become insane and had to be "sent off to a place on the Gulf Coast" where "she may still be living." When Riley was fifteen, he discovered that his uncle Horace Holton was stealing his inheritance. Riley exposed Uncle Horace and took over as head of the family, looking after his two younger sisters and becoming the town's leading playboy. But Riley is not happy about his existence. As the occupants of the treehouse engage in their confessional, Riley says,

I'm not in trouble. I'm nothing--or would you call that my trouble? I lie awake thinking what do I know how to do? hunt, drive a car, fool around; and I get scared when I think maybe that's all it will ever come to. Another thing, I've got no feelings--except for my sisters, which is different. Take for instance, I've been going with this girl from Rock City nearly a year, the longest time I've stayed with one girl. I guess it was a week ago she flared up and said where's your heart? said if I didn't love her she'd as soon die. So, I stopped the car on the railroad track; well, I said, let's just sit here, the Crescent's due in about twenty minutes. We didn't take our eyes off each other, and I thought isn't it mean that I'm looking at you and I don't feel anything except...22

22Ibid., p. 73.
"Except vanity?" the judge finished for Riley. Riley cannot see that anyone else is evil except Riley. He is hard on himself and on the only people he cares for, his sisters, whom he tries to make perfect. He seems to think that the aura of original sin hangs only over his family.

In the two types of innocent characters that have been explored here, one can see a development which is characteristic of the maturation of the adolescent—the growing awareness of the evils in society. However, the reader sees more of this development in the naive adolescent than in the character who refuses to accept evil. That evil does exist in society is certainly evident. That there are evil persons such as those encountered by the naive characters is also evident. The evil character will be dealt with in another chapter. The innocent characters cited here all have the characteristics and the behavior of the adolescent; they are naive, confused, rebellious, and live in a world full of dreams. The characters who reject evil share somewhat in the naivete of the innocent, but they appear to be naive by an act of the will. These characters are also confused, rebellious, and live in a world fraught with dreams of something better than that which they have. For each character there comes a time when he must face up to the world, or to the evil in the world, and examine himself to see if he can cope with his problems. Those who learn to cope with life are said to have matured. Those who do not
learn perhaps remain adolescents forever. Capote's characters are not so far-fetched or so isolated from life as some critics have suggested that they are, and they show how society and its evils add to the confusion of growing up. The innocent cannot remain innocent when he is exposed to the adult world; yet, he does not want to see the destruction of his concept of a good world. Society's influence has the result of turning good people into evil people.
CHAPTER III

A PRESENTATION OF SOME OF THE EVIL CHARACTERS
IN CAPOTE'S WORKS

Just as there are both good and evil people in the world, so there are good and evil characters in Capote's works. Even in his dream worlds, or worlds of "day" and of "night," as Paul Levine¹ calls them, there are the naive and the knowledgeable, the good and the evil. Not all of Capote's characters fall into one class or the other. In fact, his evil characters are usually not all evil, although his good characters frequently appear to be all good at the reader's first introduction to them. That is, sometimes characters develop their evil characteristics as the story progresses, as is the case of Miriam in the story "Miriam." More frequently, though, Capote gives his readers an almost diametric opposite, a black and white, in his stories. Some of the naive, innocent, or good characters have been discussed in the previous chapter. In order to demonstrate the opposite poles of the Capote characters, exploration of the evil characters is necessary. Capote's works offer a wealth

of evil characters who range from the totally depraved to the mildly evil. Among the first group one finds such examples of evil as homosexuals, murderers, and thieves (thieves who steal "dreams"). Then Capote runs the full gamut of evil down to other evil characters who, often unknowingly, help to destroy a person's faith in himself or in the society of which he is a part. To determine which evil is most damaging is almost impossible. To a Utilitarian, the character whose evil deeds touch the most people would be considered the worst. The purpose of this study, however, is not to judge the degree of depravity but to show how it affects any one or any group of people within the limits of the story.

Evil in the context of this study at least, may be defined as anything that violates or is inconsistent with the accepted moral law. It is also anything that is harmful or injurious. Evil is characterized or accompanied by misfortune or suffering. Evil is synonymous with sin, iniquity, depravity, corruption, and wickedness. "All societies, large or small, simple or complex, define certain patterns of behavior that are necessary for the functioning of the society and assign these patterns of behavior to individuals." Any thing that violates this "pattern of behavior" is said to be evil. In the same sense, anything that is abnormal is

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2Fillmore H. Sanford, Psychology: A Scientific Study of Man (Belmont, California, 1965), p. 537.
evil because it is inconsistent with this same "pattern of behavior" or "the accepted moral law." Any set of beliefs held by a group is normal; however, there is no defined limit to the term abnormal. What seems to be important in our society is the maintenance of the status quo, for to alter the status quo is to be pointed out as abnormal or evil. Anything that is harmful to the individual or to the society is also considered evil. Thus, suicide, matricide, regicide, and any other crime involving murder is evil because it not only harms the individual or society physically, but because it upsets the standards of the society. These laws of society were once based on practicality. When a tribe is small, the murder of one member of the tribe lessens the chances of that tribe's surviving the attacks of the neighboring tribes. Within the small group, any deviant practice, such as incest or homosexuality, also lessens the chances of survival. These practical doctrines are maintained after the society grows large and are incorporated into the code of ethics or morality of the society. They become so ingrained that deviation from these rules constitutes overt or evil action.

Evil usually appears in Capote's early novels as Gothic horror. Gothic novels are those in which "magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Horrors abound:

one may expect a suit of armor suddenly to come to life, while ghosts, clanking chains, and charnel houses import an uncanny atmosphere of terror."\textsuperscript{5} In the Gothic novel there is always the anticipation of harm whether harm ever comes to the characters. Using the Gothic effect, Capote not only exposes his characters to evils that may be quite common in society, but also to those of a mysterious, supernatural nature. The aura of suspense makes even the most trivial occurrence seem to be the work of some satanic being lurking in the shadows to attack the characters. This satanic being is in Capote's works, usually lurking in the shadows of the mind, waiting to seize the consciousness of the innocent victim—the naive person who is about to be initiated to evil. In some cases, the evil is brought to life in the form of a character in the story.

Among the most evil of the characters is Randolph Skully, the homosexual cousin of Joel Knox in Other Voices, Other Rooms. Randolph is one who discovered the world of evil while in his early twenties and surrendered himself to it completely. Randolph had aspirations to be an artist, and made the pilgrimage to Europe to learn to paint when he was a very young man. He learned to copy the old masters quite well; he did not learn to paint originals very well at

all. While in Madrid he met Dolores, a desirable girl of obscure Latin origin who spoke "flawless" English. He and Dolores lived together for months, traveling about to various parts of Europe, finally settling in Florida. Theirs was an idyllic relationship until Randolph found Dolores' "dream book," in which he eventually reads of his own death as Dolores had dreamed it. Just as D. J.'s painting in "The Headless Hawk" revealed to Vincent the end that he could look forward to, so Dolores' book showed Randolph his future. He was to be a victim of time. Randolph shortly afterward discovered that he was in love not with Dolores but with her new boy friend, Pepe Alvarez. This discovery, and the consequent turning to homosexuality, in some way gave Randolph an escape from time. After shooting Ed Sansom in a peculiar, dream-like sequence, Randolph went with Amy and Ed to the Skully home, Skully's Landing, to live out a timeless existence in the old house that is, like the House of Usher, sinking into the swamp.

Randolph, after once discovering that he is homosexual, allows himself to sink into the swamp just as the old house does. He finds that his is the strongest personality at the Landing, so he makes himself ruler of the household. Amy, the only person in the house who could defy Randolph, is too weak-minded and too weak-willed to attempt to assert herself. Zoo, being a Negro, cannot, in a Southern society, make any real attempt to contradict her employers. Joel, in his
moment of self-discovery, finds that he is strong, but he may eventually allow himself to fall under Randolph's power. Certainly Randolph proves to be attractive to those about him. Amy is drawn to Randolph by bonds of family relationship and by the fact that Randolph owns the house in which she lives. Zoo is bound to Randolph because he is her employer and because the Landing offers her some security. She is attracted by, but has no success in, the outside world. Joel is drawn to Randolph because he is seeking someone to love him. Randolph appears to Joel as a father image first and later as a love object. Whether this love is ever consummated is undetermined. Randolph realizes his power over these other people and uses it to his own advantage to keep his isolated world as comfortable for himself as possible. What more could he want? He has a cook, a housekeeper, family members, and a lover all within the confines of the Landing. And he keeps them there. Zoo returns to the Landing because she is disappointed in the outside world. Amy stays because she has her "duty" to Randolph and Ed. Joel is tricked into staying by Randolph's taking him to the Cloud Hotel when Aunt Ellen comes to visit the Landing. Randolph also steals the letters that Joel tries to mail to his family and friends in New Orleans. Randolph is the personification of Satan: he offers the temptation of the easy life and takes the souls of those who accept his offer. Anyone who remains at the Landing becomes lethargic and loses
contact with reality; he becomes a puppet of the supreme bogey man—Randolph.

In Other Voices, Other Rooms there is a group of characters who cannot be described as evil in themselves, but they contribute to Randolph's scheme. Little Sunshine, the hermit; Idabel, the neighbor girl; Zoo Fever, the Skully cook; and Cousin Amy all aid in the attempted corruption of Joel. Little Sunshine's appearance adds to the already-eerie atmosphere of the Landing. He is a wizard man who makes and sells charms and lives in the deserted Cloud Hotel. He knows all the fears of the swamp and capitalizes on these fears to maintain his isolation and keep his position as the local bogeyman. He is feared by both white and black. Even Idabel, who is not afraid to go into the woods by herself at night, is terrified of Little Sunshine. Though the old Negro appears to be friendly, Joel is influenced by the stories he has heard and is afraid of him. Little Sunshine is a friend of Randolph's, and it is he who helps to keep Joel from meeting Aunt Ellen at the Landing. But more than anything, Little Sunshine, like the Cloud Hotel, is just another of the Gothic fixtures that give Other Voices, Other Rooms its mysterious atmosphere.

Idabel, one of the Thompkins twins who live near the Landing, is a contributing factor in Joel's arrested development in that she is all that he would like to be: self-assured, unafraid, and masculine. Yet Idabel is the one who
finally destroys Joel's chances of gaining maturity. Idabel's continual striving to be a boy, her rejections of Joel's adolescent advances toward her, and her final "desertion" of Joel add fuel to the ever-growing flame that is destroying his masculine development and driving him to Randolph. Idabel says, "'I want so much to be a boy: I would be a sailor, I would. . . .' the quality of her futility was touching." She utters her wish just before she and Joel swim together, an episode which both excites and humiliates Joel. The thought of swimming nude with a girl is stimulating, but Idabel's nonchalant reaction is humiliating. Because she wants so much to be a boy, the physical differences between her and Joel do not affect her. Idabel is not an evil person. There are hints that she, like Randolph, and, perhaps, Joel, tends toward homosexuality; but only hints are given. A girl's wishing to be a boy is not unusual in the early stages of adolescence. The effect that Idabel has on Joel, though, is to drive him to the real evil in Other Voices, Other Rooms—Randolph.

Zoo Fever and even Amy Skully also help in pushing Joel toward Randolph. Zoo, earlier in the story, presents a sexual attraction to the impressionable Joel. Her animal magnetism draws Joel to her. Yet the scars of her marriage to Keg, her running away from the Landing, and her experience

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6Truman Capote, Other Voices, Other Rooms (New York, 1948), p. 132.
with the truck driver during her journey, have the same
effect on Joel as Idabel's masculine traits. Zoo's actions
and experiences make Joel fear normal relationships with
girls. Zoo gets hurt in each of her attempts to live
normally---she is raped, beaten, and slashed with a razor.
Joel may be afraid that some harm could come to him if he
attempts to make love to a girl. Amy's unhesitating acqui-
escence to every wish of Randolph's sets the example for
Joel to follow. Further, both Zoo and Amy are kept at the
Landing by invisible ties---fears or desires known only to
them. They are always giving in to their fears and to
Randolph and help to keep Joel at the Landing within the
clutches of the pervading evil.

Two characters of *The Grass Harp* link together to show
Collin the evils of society. Verena Talbo and her friend
Dr. Morris Ritz both demonstrate a kind of evil; both help
to destroy Collin's childhood world. Verena is not a bad
person, but her actions frequently belie her motives. When
she brings Morris Ritz from Chicago to manufacture Dolly's
dropsy cure, she is not interested only in herself. At
least she believes that she has Dolly's interests at heart,
also. However, her continual striving to make money and her
overbearing treatment of those whom she loves drives Collin
away from her and from a society that worships monetary
success. Morris Ritz is another matter. This "Little Jew"
is really one of the villains of *The Grass Harp*. Ritz
capitalizes on his influence over Verena to steal several thousand dollars in money and bonds from her. He also helps to introduce Collin to the vulgar aspect of sex in their first meeting. Ritz is repulsive in appearance; he is also repulsive in his actions. Ritz has the effect not of luring the adolescent to evil, but of driving him away. In one sense the people like Morris Ritz are not so sinister as those like the Reverend and Mrs. Buster, whose evil natures are sugar-coated with a religious veneer.

The Grass Harp contains a pair of people whose evil is almost beyond the limits of comprehension to anyone who was reared to respect the church and its clergymen. The Reverend Mr. Buster is one of those country preachers who have decided that whatever they say is the word of God. Like the Puritan judges of Arthur Miller's Crucible, he "speaks God's law" and will not "crack its voice with whimpering." When Buster appears at the treehouse with his wife, the sheriff, Mrs. Macy, and Judge Cool, he is determined to retrieve the rebels who are disobeying God. When Judge Cool tries to intervene in behalf of the three people in the tree, Buster asks, "Why did you come with us if it wasn't to do the Lord's will in a spirit of mercy?" The Judge indicates that the minister does not know God's will any more than the next person. However, the undaunted "Reverend Buster" continues, in God's

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name, to demand that Collin, Dolly, and Catherine climb down from the tree like "good Christians." When the Sheriff uses the word hell in his argument with the rebels, Mrs. Buster is greatly offended and says that "under no circumstances would she tolerate swearing: Will we, Reverend? and the Reverend . . . said he'd be damned if they would." The Reverend Mr. Buster is a hypocrite. He behaves in a manner that befits a member of his profession when this kind of behavior suits his purpose, but he acts like a scoundrel when his authority is placed in doubt. The hypocrisy of the Busters is even more clearly demonstrated when they are instrumental in evicting the Little Homer Honey revival group from the town. Because Mr. Buster was receiving none of the proceeds from the revival, he, through Verena Talbo, convinced the Sheriff that the money gleaned from "God's clothesline" should be confiscated and the "gang of cowboys" forced to leave town. Little Homer's mother, Mrs. Honey, finds herself and her more than fifteen children on the road with one-half gallon of gas in their truck and about sixty cents in her purse. The "charitable" Reverend Buster, leader of the flock, manages once again to use his influence as God's spokesman to work only for his own aggrandizement. He wants to be in the position of power at all times.

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8 Ibid., p. 51.
Mrs. Buster always shares in her husband's never-ending drive for power and fame by backing him up or pushing him forward to even lower levels of self-glorification. The reader infers that the Busters' intervention at the tree house was instigated by Mrs. Buster, who also insisted that Mr. Buster falsely tell Verena of the Homer Honey group's preaching about Dolly. The Busters stop at nothing to better their position in the society of their little town. This pair commit many sins in the name of God— they lie, they steal (from the Homer Honey group), and they lead the posse to keep the three escapists from upsetting the Christian dignity of the town.

Breakfast at Tiffany's does not concentrate on the evil characters so much as do some of the other works of Capote. Though Holly is one of those persons who refuses to accept evil, she is not confronted by the bogey man villains of the other stories. However, in Breakfast at Tiffany's there are two characters who must be called evil people. These two are the motion picture producer, O. J. Berman, and the gangster, Sally Tomato. Berman is the one who describes Holly as a real phony, but he is also the one who tries to lure her back to Hollywood to be in the movies. Berman's evil is in trying to help Holly—in the wrong way. He wants to change her; he wants to turn her into the stereotyped starlet. Berman is not successful. The other character of evil intent is Sally Tomato, who, though in prison, uses
Holly as a messenger to his gang in the outside world. She, in keeping with her refusal to accept evil, thinks that she is merely giving weather reports to Tomato's friends, even though some of the reports, such as a prediction for snow in the summer, sound strange. Tomato uses Holly's innocence to his own advantage and, when his scheme is exposed, forces her to see the evil in him. Berman has no real success in the initiation of Holly Golightly to the evils of society, though he tries to make her accept his own values. In fact, the only one who comes close to convincing her is Jose, the Latin lover who deserts her when she receives too much publicity in connection with the Sally Tomato scandal.

Capote's "The Headless Hawk" delves deeply into that evil that lurks within every person, the fear of his future. The fact is represented in this story by Mr. Destronelli, who is, for D. J., evil personified. D. J., controlled by fear, believes that Mr. Destronelli will kill her. Vincent, who attempted to help D. J., deserts her because he thinks her demented, but she continues to haunt him. She thinks by then that Vincent is Mr. Destronelli. Earlier she has thought that many other people were her shadowy stalker, Mr. Destronelli. At a party, Vincent discovers Mr. Destronelli at last. He sees the figure of himself, as an old man, crawl forward "on all fours, and climb spiderlike onto his back." Vincent cannot shake off the figure of his future. Then he spies D. J. with the figure of an innocent child
"barnacled to her back." 9 Vincent realizes that Mr. Destronelli is not a person but is, instead, that nameless, formless fear of his own fate. D. J.'s burden of innocence says, "I am heavier than I look." Vincent's burden of jaded old age replies in a terrible voice, "But I am heaviest of all." 10 For a young man to see himself as a horrible old man with "yellow-dyed hair, powdered checks, Kewpie-doll lips" would be a horrifying experience. This is exactly the picture Vincent received of his own future. Mr. Destronelli becomes the prediction of a useless and ugly future. 11 That the picture which Vincent sees occurs in a dream in no way lessens its validity. The dream worlds of Capote's characters have a way of being quite real.

"Master Misery" presents another of the evil characters in the person of Master Misery. He is a buyer of dreams. Sylvia wants to escape the falsity of the world. She wants to find an ideal world—the object of all her childhood dreams. Sylvia discovers quickly that even imaginary worlds must be financed with real money, and her meager supply is soon exhausted. She learns through a derelict named O'Reilly that people can sell their dreams to a Mr. Revercomb. When she tells O'Reilly on one occasion that she had a "ten-dollar dream," he says, "It's a good thing the rest of Master

10Ibid., p. 161.
11Levine, p. 608.
Misery's crowd don't know he gave you that ten bucks. One of them would say you stole the dream. I had that happen once. Eaten up all of 'em..."\textsuperscript{12} Apparently there is a large group of persons who exist by selling the dreams which they jealously guard from all but Mr. Revercomb, who is Master Misery. O'Reilly attaches himself to the naive Sylvia because he has sold all his dreams. O'Reilly reveals his belief that Master Misery has no soul of his own and that he buys other people's dreams because "dreams are the mind of the soul and the truth about all of us." Master Misery becomes the bogey man that is seen in other Capote stories. He steals the wasted dreams, the unrealized hopes, of all people who try to escape society by avoiding responsibility. They have let their chances pass by and can live only on dreams. Sylvia discovers that by selling her dreams she has destroyed herself.\textsuperscript{13} Without dreams she has no reason to go on living. To continue her existence, she must either steal dreams from others or return to society.

"Miriam," written when Capote was only eighteen and winner of an O. Henry Memorial Short Story Award, is another of Capote's stories of how a sinister child can destroy a segment of the adult world. Mrs. H. T. Miller, aged sixty-nine, has lived alone in a two-room apartment since her

\textsuperscript{12} Capote, \textit{A Tree of Night}, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{13} Levine, p. 605.
husband's death. While attending a movie one night, she meets a beautiful little girl who surprisingly has the same name as Mrs. Miller—Miriam. Miriam visits Mrs. Miller a few days later and takes a brooch, a gift from Mr. Miller. Mrs. Miller objects but finds that she has no power over the demanding child. Miriam finally allows Mrs. Miller to send her away. Miriam later moves into Mrs. Miller's apartment to stay, and the woman can find no way to rid herself of the fiendish child. At Miriam's first visit to the apartment, Mrs. Miller asks herself, "How old is she? Ten? Eleven? And why has she come?" The mystery of Miriam's visit is not solved, but at this first intrusion she establishes herself as the dominant personality. When she takes the brooch, the only reason Miriam gives is, "But it's beautiful and I want it. Give it to me." Mrs. Miller is powerless; she cannot prevent the taking of the brooch, and her powerlessness makes her realize that "there was no one to whom she might turn; she was alone; a fact that had not been among her thoughts for a long time." Through Miriam's intrusion, Mrs. Miller's feeling of loneliness is intensified. Mrs. Miller's fate should have been recognizable to her earlier in the story when Miriam first comes to the apartment. When Mrs. Miller asks Miriam how the girl knew where to find her,

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14 Capote, A Tree of Night, p. 122.
15 Ibid., p. 123.
16 Ibid.
the reply is, "That's no question at all. What's your name? What's mine?" Miriam becomes "The primal alter ego to Mrs. Miller, an extension of her destructive unconscious instinct." Miriam is destructive: anything she dislikes, like the vase of artificial roses, she smashes. She demands delicacies of her host, she takes whatever she wants, and she moves into the apartment just because she wants to. That Miriam is not physically real may be inferred from the scene in which a neighbor goes to Mrs. Miller's apartment to evict the little girl and finds no trace of anyone. The assumption may be made that Levine's conclusion is correct. Miriam is an extension of Mrs. Miller that grows in the seed bed of her lonely life. Because of her isolation, Mrs. Miller looks into herself for companionship and finds a frightening "friend."

"Children on Their Birthdays" gives us a brighter version of Miriam in the character of Miss Bobbit. Ten-year-old Miss Bobbit appears "Grotesquely made up like an adult and sporting a parasol. . . . She impresses the reader as a fantastic mixture of innocence and experience, morality and pragmatism." Miss Bobbit enters into the settled life of a quiet Southern town to turn the entire population inside out. The two fourteen-year-olds, Billy Bob and Preacher

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17 Ibid., p. 121.  
18 Levine, p. 606.  
19 Ibid., p. 603.
Star, their girl friends, and even the local merchants feel the effect of Miss Bobbit. The adult bearing of the child is unsettling to those who see her. Her always speaking for her mother, and in such a grown-up manner, also seems out of place. Miss Bobbit is either conceited or really convinced of her ability and appeal, and she uses this appeal to her own advantage in getting Billy Bob and Preacher to sell magazines for her. She does things apparently designed to upset people, such as befriending the Negro girl Rosalba Cat. The two girls even call each other "Sister," which causes a stir (and several jokes) in this Southern community. She demands to be called Miss Bobbit and is, with few qualms on the part of her elders. Miss Bobbit is truly an amazing child who "sings like Sophie Tucker, dances like Gypsy Rose Lee, and possesses the business acumen of a Folly Adler." Miss Bobbit is a thoroughly evil person who, with the help of Sister Rosalba, kills dogs because they bark and chases after money as if it were the only goal worthy of mankind's efforts. Her religion is devil worship.

"I don't want you to think I'm a heathen, Mr. C: I've had enough experience to know that there is a God and that there is a Devil. But the way to tame the Devil is not to go down there to church and listen to what a sinful fool he is. No, love the Devil like you do Jesus: because he is a powerful man, and will do you a good turn if he knows you trust him. He has frequently done me good turns, like at dancing school in Memphis ... I always called in the Devil to help me

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Ibid.
Miss Bobbit's devil certainly smiles on her. She convinces a group of townspeople to send her to Hollywood to become a star. When she is ready to leave, the two boys whose friendship she destroyed bring her roses. In her rush to accept a reward she does not deserve, she is run over by the six o'clock bus, the one she was to leave on. Miss Bobbit's evil is the sin of vanity carried to the extent that she cares for no one but herself. She uses people to achieve her own goals. She hurts people purposely if her cause can be furthered by doing so. Her selfishness destroys the friendship of Preacher and Billy Bob. Yet she is convinced that what she does is right. She is truly a devil worshipper.

"A Tree of Night" gives to its readers Capote's typical bogey man of the childhood dreams. The innocent Kay is "intimidated by two grotesque carnival performers: a deaf mute who plays Lazarus by being buried alive . . . and his

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21 Capote, A Tree of Night, pp. 49-50.
one connection with the outside world, a woman made freakish
by her huge head."\textsuperscript{22} The deaf mute and his companion's
insistent manner and droning voice have a hypnotic effect on
Kay. She, like Vincent, Mrs. Miller, and Sylvia, discovers
in herself the latent fear, "a childish memory of terrors
that once, long ago, had hovered above her like haunted limbs
on a tree of night. Aunts, cooks, strangers—each eager to
spin a tale or teach a rhyme of spooks and death. . . ."\textsuperscript{23}
The deaf mute is the wizard man or bogey man who comes to
take the naughty child. He is the threat of punishment for
any childish prank. Kay's refusal to buy a love charm from
the deaf mute brings on a scolding lecture from the woman
and a feeling of guilt on the part of the girl. When Kay
finally agrees to buy the charm, she is hypnotized by the
moon-like face of the man. The woman takes Kay's purse and
pulls "the raincoat like a shroud above her head."\textsuperscript{24} Kay is
really taken away by the bogey man. The fear within her
actually destroys her.

Old Bonaparte is the evil character in "House of Flowers."
She is the grandmother-in-law of Ottilie, the main character.
Old Bonaparte is a repulsive old hag who tries to cast a
spell on her grandson's wife after all other attempts to

\textsuperscript{22}Levine, pp. 608-609.
\textsuperscript{23}Capote, \textit{A Tree of Night}, pp. 207-208.
\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 209.
break up the marriage between Ottilie and Royal have failed. Earlier in the story her evil ways had consisted mainly of spitting on the floor, wetting the bed, keeping a goat in the house, and telling Royal that his wife was worthless because she could not keep a clean house. From making messes and carrying stories to Royal, Old Bonaparte progressed to trying to cast a spell on Ottilie by putting a cat's head, a chopped snake, spiders, lizards, and a buzzard into Ottilie's sewing basket. Ottilie, by this time initiated to the old woman's evil ways, reverses the spell by mixing all the creatures from the sewing basket into Old Bonaparte's food. When the old lady learns of the trick, she immediately dies. However, her evil lives after her to haunt Ottilie, who continues to hear Old Bonaparte's laughter and see her "evil eye" glowing in the dark. Ottilie is driven to confess her crime to Royal, who demonstrates man's desire for revenge and mastery by tying her to a tree so that anyone who passes may see his evil wife. Old Bonaparte's actions set off a chain of events which brings evil into the lives of two people.

In "A Christmas Memory" Capote presents the most sinister of the evils that may be found in his stories—the evil that sometimes results from an attempt to do good. After eight-year-old Buddy and his "friend," a sixtyish spinster cousin, get drunk on whiskey that is left over from Christmas fruitcakes, "Those who Know Best" send Buddy away.
"Those who Know Best" are trying to remove Buddy from the bad influence of his eccentric cousin. The evil that results from the actions of "Those who Know Best" is that Buddy learned more of love and understanding from his "friend" than from any other source. Removing him from his "friend's" influence removed him from the best teacher of moral values that was available to him. "Those who Know Best" did not replace the love that the older cousin had for Buddy; instead, they sent him to a place where there can be little real affection—a military school. Buddy says, "And so follows a miserable succession of bugle-blowing prisons, grim reveille-ridden summer camps. I have a new home too, but it doesn't count. Home is where my friend is, and there I never go."25 "Those who Know Best" deprived the boy of his home, his friend, and his companion, all in his own best interests. This evil, the evil of good intentions, is the most harmful and most insidious of all evils.

Capote's evil characters take many forms, but each has the same purpose. Each of the evil characters attempts to introduce the naive person to the world of evil. Evil is not always triumphant. Sometimes the innocent is destroyed, sometimes he is hurt but recovers, and sometimes he ignores evil completely. In any case, the evil characters usually take the form of the sinister, formless, Gothic fears that

are instilled in the minds of children. The evil characters, then, are usually not actual persons but are the darkest imaginings of the affected characters. The evil is no less real because it is not a physical actuality. The destructive force of the mind is quite powerful; it can cripple or kill the person who concentrates on the dark and sinister corners of his own mind. Imagined evil is generally apparent in Capote's novels and short stories, and the imagined evil is linked with real evil to produce a devastating effect on the naive characters.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: IN COLD BLOOD AS A
SUMMATION OF CAPOTE'S THEMES

The conclusion of this study will focus upon Truman
Capote's In Cold Blood, for the book appears to be a summa-
tion of many of Capote's themes and is, in itself, the
culmination of his theme of a character's growing awareness
of the evil in society. In Cold Blood points out Capote's
view of society as the force that spawns evil in the indi-
vidual, and this kind of evil is one of Capote's basic themes.

In Cold Blood presents a departure from Capote's earlier
works in peripheral subject matter but not in basic theme.
He had been toying with the idea of a new literary form, the
non-fiction novel, for some time before he devoted intense
research to the multiple murder of the Clutter family of
Holcomb, Kansas. He had earlier experimented with non-fiction
writing in The Muses Are Heard, an account of the American
production of Porgy and Bess in the Soviet Union in the 1955-
56 theater season. An even earlier excursion into non-fiction
writing is found in the travel sketches of the collection
Local Color. These two works and his interviews with such
celebrities as Marlon Brando are nothing more than very
highly stylized reportage, but they served as preliminaries
to the non-fiction novel which was developing in Capote's mind. The only thing he needed to express this new literary form was a subject of such importance, or at least of such interest, that the resulting work would be read. Capote's subject was created for him by the 1959 quadruple murder of the Clutter family, an act that gave Capote the material he needed to begin his task. Why was a murder chosen for the subject? Capote claims that he was not trying to glamorize crime. He says that he could have written a novel about other subjects just as easily:

I don't think crime is all that interesting a subject. What could be more cut and dried, really, than two ex-convicts who set out to rob a family and end up killing them? The important thing is the depth you can plunge to and the height you can reach. The art form I've invented allows for great flexibility that way.

According to Capote, any subject might be written about just as interestingly as crime. He says he has two or three subjects in mind that he may write about yet.

Capote has spent a great deal of time explaining to the reading public and his critics how he was striving to create a "new art form" with the "non-fiction novel" In Cold Blood. In connection with this book he has been accused of having a lack of imagination and of exploiting the two men who are the central characters of In Cold Blood. To the first charge,

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1 Jane Howard, "How the 'Smart Rascal' Brought It Off," Life, LX (January 7, 1966), 76.
Capote has answered:

They're the ones whose imaginations have failed, not me. What I've done is much harder than a conventional novel. You have to get away from your own particular vision of the world. Too many writers are mesmerized by their own navels. I've had that problem myself which was one reason I wanted to do a book about a place absolutely new to me—one where the terrain, the accents and the people would all seem freshly minted. I thought it would sharpen my eye and quicken my ear.²

As to his exploitation of the two criminals, Capote has been hard-put for an answer, but he has rationalized his making of money with In Cold Blood:

I even feel guilty taking any money for it at all . . . and I really resent people saying I just did it to get rich. Why, I could have written four different novels in the time it took me to write this one and made lots more money than I will make. I went out there not even knowing, or caring, whether I'd ever clear a dime from it. I went way out on a limb and risked six years of my life not to get rich but to invent a serious new art form. Besides, what if I do make a million dollars or so, what's so great about that? A million dollars in six years is not more than a lot of small-time businessmen get.³

But to return to Capote's earlier statement about writers becoming "mesmerized by their own navels" and about his writing In Cold Blood to change perspective: has Capote ceased to gaze at his own navel? Has his perspective changed? The answer to these questions is obviously "no" to any reader who is aware of the continuity of Capote's basic themes. In his earlier stories he wrote over and over about the people

²Ibid., p. 73. ³Ibid.
who gained awareness of society's evils. Joel Knox, Collin Fenwick, Vincent, Mrs. Miller, Ottilie, Buddy, and all the others learned that the ideal world of the imagination is not parallel to the actual world. The ideal world offers only a temporary retreat, but these people must learn to face reality or live with the horrors of their imaginations, horrors like the Miriam of Mrs. Miller's mind. Then these characters must live in their dream worlds or worlds of unreality. Other characters use their knowledge to adjust to the real world. Collin's knowledge of evil helps him to adjust to the life of the adult society. He learns to use subterfuge to his advantage. He learns that the grass harp sings only of the past, but it is not the world that he is fated to live in. Some, like Joel Knox, maintain a kind of dream-like reality which is the result of arrested development. These characters represent the people who never learn to cope with society. The Joels of the world remain isolated from society, and while they may come into contact with something society considers evil, in their own world they remain innocent. The types of characters who are central in *In Cold Blood* are the innocent and the evil characters.

Capote's themes come together in *In Cold Blood* in the relationship between Dick and Perry. Dick is the evil character; Perry is the Capote innocent. Without the influence of Dick, Perry would not have killed the Clutters,
though he might have killed someone else, of course. Anyone might.

Capote has pointed out that his purpose in writing the "non-fiction novel" was to avoid repeating his earlier themes. But he has chosen to repeat these themes even in his fine example of reportage. The only conclusion that the reader can come to is that in Capote's view of the world, evil is a product of society and not a characteristic of the individual. His presentation of characters in *In Cold Blood* is certainly accurate. He has never been accused of misquoting or of misrepresenting any of the people who appear in his book. However, his selection of material gives a slanted picture of his two central characters. The reader begins to feel sympathy for them, although, unless he is a super humanitarian, he should desire their capture and punishment. Capote presents the little details from Dick's and Perry's past, the poverty and mistreatment, which lead to their later criminal acts and appear to be based on a desire to gain wealth and to punish the representatives of a society which has mistreated them. This kind of presentation supports the theme that has become apparent in most of Capote's works—that evil is a product of society, not of the individual.

Joel Knox is a victim of the circumstances which cast him out of society and into the mysterious surroundings of

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Skully's Landing. Collin Fenwick, because of the evil that he learns is around him, tries to desert society, but he learns that there is a place for him. Sadly, the two real people, Dick and Perry, never discover their roles in society and remain outcasts. Because they are cast out, the two criminals strike back with disastrous results for four innocent people.

Capote could have hardly chosen a better subject than the two killers to further illustrate his theme of evil in society. These young men, while they are cold-blooded killers, are really not responsible for their crime; the society which had never given them a chance to better themselves is responsible. At least, this seems to be Capote's interpretation. Yet, he indicates that he believes in capital punishment. Perhaps the idea is that since society created the monster, society is responsible for doing away with it. His objective point of view would seem to indicate that he has no feelings for his subject; that is, that he is not demonstrating any emotion toward them. Yet, his material for presentation of his real people is selected so carefully that they emerge looking like his fictional characters.

Thus, one must determine that In Cold Blood is a presentation of Capote's ideas as well as a presentation of a crime and criminals. It becomes more than a bit of stylized reportage; it becomes the essence of the view of Truman Capote.
Some of the characters of *In Cold Blood* are amazingly similar to the adolescents of his earlier stories. Smith appears to be much like such characters as Joel Knox and Collin Fenwick. Perry almost perfectly fits the mold of Capote's naive adolescent in the earlier works. Perry Smith, who is really the central figure of *In Cold Blood*, and Joel Knox of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, are similar characters even though their ages are quite different—Joel is thirteen while Perry is thirty-one at the time of the Clutter murder. Perry and Joel are both products of broken homes. In each instance the parents were divorced and the mother died later. Both fathers are ineffectual men; Joel's father, Ed Sansom, is a hopelessly crippled man who cannot speak and can move only his eyes and one arm. Perry's father, Tex John Smith, is a social outcast (he calls himself "The Lone Wolf"), a person who has outlived his time. Tex Smith is a prospector, hunter, and jack-of-all-trades, though, by his own admission, he has mastered no trade. Tex is an object of ridicule in civilized society and a source of embarrassment for Perry, who wants so badly to find his place in society. Both Perry and Joel find that they have no status with their immediate family, and they compensate for their lack of status by retreating into dream worlds, an escape mechanism that they share with Collin Fenwick and other Capote characters. Perry Smith, though he was a real person, is nothing more than an adult Joel Knox.
Smith uses the same escape device that Joel uses—he daydreams. Smith's daydreams are quite elaborate, just as Joel's are; but unlike Joel's dreams, in which the dominant figure was his unknown father, Smith's dreams always feature Perry Smith or his imagined alter ego Perry O'Parsons. Smith finds himself finally triumphant in these dreams. He is no longer the insignificant, crippled punk; rather, he becomes the center of attention of large, admiring crowds:

Singing, and the thought of doing so in front of an audience, was another mesmeric way of whittling hours. He always used the same mental scenery—a night club in Las Vegas, which happened to be his home town. It was an elegant room filled with celebrities excitedly focused on the sensational new star rendering his famous, backed-by-violins version of "I'll Be Seeing You" and encoring with his latest self-composed ballad:

Every April flights of parrots
Fly overhead, red and green,
Green and tangerine.
I see them fly, I hear them high,
Singing parrots bringing April spring. . . .

Hickock once shattered Smith's illusions about his "self-composed ballad" by commenting, "parrots don't sing. Talk, maybe. Holler. But they sure as hell don't sing." With Dick around, Perry's daydreams never offer as much comfort as they do with Dick absent.

Another of Perry's dominant daydreams concerns the search for lost treasure:

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6 Ibid.
Since childhood, for more than half his thirty-one years, he had been sending off for literature ("FORTUNES IN DIVING! Train at Home in Your Spare Time. Make Big Money Fast in Skin and Lung Diving. Free Booklets . . ."), answering advertisements ("SUNKEN TREASURE! Fifty Genuine Maps! Amazing Offer . . .") that stoked a longing to realize an adventure his imagination swiftly over and over enabled him to experience: the dream of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward a green sea—dusk, sliding past the scaly, savage-eyed protectors of a ship's bulk that loomed ahead, a Spanish galleon—a downed cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold.

Dick, the "pragmatist," also shatters this favorite illusion after the pair leave Mexico, one of Perry's favorite imagined settings for the treasure hunt. Dick indicates to Perry that all his schemes are a waste of time because there is no buried treasure. Finally, when the two have made their way to Florida, leaving behind a trail of bad checks in Kansas City, Perry, in a moment of despair, realizes the falsity of his illusions:

Anyway, he couldn't see that he had "a lot to live for." Hot islands and buried gold, diving deep in fire-blue seas toward sunken treasure—such dreams were gone. Gone, too was "Perry O'Parsons," the name invented for the singing sensation of stage and screen that he'd half-seriously hoped some day to be. Perry O'Parsons had died without ever having lived. What was there to look forward to? He and Dick were "running a race without a finish line"—that was how it struck him.

Perry's illusions are destroyed by the realization that he will not remain free long enough to make them a reality.

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7 Ibid., pp. 16-17.  
This realization, coupled with Dick's apparently pragmatic approach to life, destroy all of Perry's dreams except one.

Perry Smith's dream of his "avenging angel" the "great yellow bird" remains with him almost to the end of his life.

The "great yellow bird" is a parrot which had first flown into his dreams when he was seven years old, a hated, hating half-breed child living in a California orphanage run by nuns—shrouded disciplinarians who whipped him for wetting his bed. It was after one of these beatings, one he could never forget ("She woke me up. She had a flashlight, and she hit me. And when the flashlight broke, she went on hitting me in the dark"), that the parrot appeared, arrived while he slept, a bird "taller than Jesus, yellow like a sunflower, a warrior-angel who blinded the nuns with its beak, fed upon their eyes, slaughtered them as they "pleaded for mercy," then so gently lifted him, enfolded him, winged him away to "paradise."

As the years went by, the particular torments from which the bird delivered him altered; other children, his father, a faithless girl, a sergeant he'd known in the Army—replaced the nuns, but the parrot remained, a hovering avenger. Thus, the snake, that custodian of the diamond-bearing tree, never finished devouring him but was itself always devoured. And afterward the blessed ascent! Ascension to a paradise that in one version was merely "a feeling," a sense of power, of unassailable superiority—sensations that in another version were transposed into "A real place. Like out of a movie."\(^9\)

When Perry considers suicide as an escape from the hangman's rope, the parrot appears again,

One night he dreamed that he'd unscrewed the light bulb, broken it, and with the broken glass cut his wrists and ankles. "I felt all

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 93.
breath and light leaving me," he said, in a subsequent description of his sensation. "The walls of the cell fell away, the sky came down, I saw the big yellow bird."

"She lifted me, I could have been light as a mouse, we went up, up, I could see the square below, men running, yelling, the sheriff shooting at us, everybody sore as hell because I was free, I was flying, I was better than any of them."10

The yellow bird is the source of escape from any difficulty for Perry. He represents salvation to the undersized, crippled halfbreed; but the yellow bird eventually deserts Perry's dreams. Another of Perry's attempts to escape hanging, after being sent to "the Corner," the death house of Kansas State Prison at Lansing, is his trying to starve himself. In his dreams, which are induced by pain and weakness, the yellow bird does not give him release from a dangerous situation, and Perry O'Parsons becomes a doomed phantom:

All summer Perry undulated between half-awake stupors and sickly, sweat-drenched sleep. Voices roared through his head; one voice persistently asked him, "Where is Jesus? Where?" And once he woke up shouting, "The bird is Jesus! The bird is Jesus!" His favorite old theatrical fantasy, the one in which he thought of himself as "Perry O'Parsons, The One-Man Symphony," returned in the guise of a recurrent dream. The dream's geographical center was a Las Vegas night club where, wearing a white top hat and a white tuxedo, he strutted about a spotlighted stage playing in turn a harmonica, a guitar, a banjo, drums, sang "You Are My Sunshine," and tap-danced up a short flight of gold-painted prop steps; at the top, standing on a platform he took a bow. There was no applause, none, and yet thousands of patrons packed the vast and gaudy room--a strange

10 Ibid., pp. 265-266.
audience, mostly men and mostly Negroes. Staring at them the perspiring entertainer at last understood their silence, for suddenly he knew that these were phantoms, the ghosts of the legally annihilated, the hanged, the gassed, the electrocuted—and in the same instant he realized that he was there to join them, that the gold-painted steps had led to a scaffold, that the platform on which he stood was opening beneath him. His top hat tumbled; urinating, defecating, Perry O'Parsons entered eternity.\footnote{Ibid., p. 219.}

Perry finally realizes that for him dreams will not ever become realities. Perry's discovery, like Joel's at Skully's Landing, gives him the ability to adapt to the situation facing him. He returns to the Corner to await execution, but he uses his time reading and doing some writing. He attempts to improve his faulty education, which is only one of the things that makes him feel inferior...

Because of his unusual background and his being half Indian, Perry has always been mistreated. Bedwetting, for which the nuns beat him, was a chronic problem with Perry. It was a condition which developed because his kidneys were weakened by a diet, consisting almost entirely of sweets, that was forced upon him by his parents when he was quite young. The Salvation Army shelter matron humiliated him by calling him "Halfbreed." Perry feels that his father takes advantage of him and only wants him around whenever he can help Tex in one way or another. He hates his mother, who is a woman of loose morals. He dislikes her immorality, but,
even more, he hates her because she did not care for her children. In the service Perry is always bothered by homosexuals and develops a superficial hatred for them, though his repeated verbal attacks against them make the reader feel that, perhaps, Perry himself has strong homosexual tendencies. After he is crippled in a motorcycle accident, Perry feels even more left out of society. He cannot sustain any kind of relationship with anyone. Perry is the naive individual who, as long as he is isolated from society, remains innocent. Contact with the world for this undersized young man means ridicule from those who do not understand him. He must eventually strike out at them. Considering his life as Capote presents it, Perry's eventual murder of the Clutters is not surprising. As Perry says, "They [the Clutters] never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it." Perry Smith is really just the misplaced young man—the same character as Joel Knox, whose trip to the Landing is the search for his true identity.

Richard Eugene Hickock, the other major character of *In Cold Blood*, is a different type from Perry. Dick is evil. He has recognized the evil of society and has been caught up in its wake. Having been married twice, arrested several
times, and having served three years in Kansas State Penitentiary for burglary, Hickock has one talent—he is a "hot-check artist." Dick, with his pleasant manner and clean-cut, boy-next-door appearance can, as Perry says, "con" anyone into doing anything. Dick is an intelligent young man (his I. Q. was rated at one hundred thirty by a prison test), but his actions are unstable. The psychiatrist who testified as a defense witness thought that the instability might be attributed to a head injury that Hickock received in an automobile accident. The outstanding characteristic of his instability is that he seemingly cannot cope with a steady job and the responsibilities of family life. After short periods of time working as a mechanic, his one legitimate accomplishment, Dick would return to writing bad checks and stealing. Perry explains Dick's actions by telling a friend,

Dick loves to steal. It's an emotional thing with him—a sickness. I'm a thief too, but only if I don't have the money to pay. Dick, if he was carrying a hundred dollars in his pocket, he'd steal a stick of chewing gum.  

Perry's assessment is apparently correct. Dick steals for the thrill of it—or because stealing gives him some emotional satisfaction.

Hickock's background is one of poverty, though he never admits that his background might be the reason for his turning to crime. "We [his family] were never really down-and-out.

\[13\] Ibid., p. 290.
"... We always had clean clothes and something to eat."  

But Dick envies the rich people; he hates them. When he and Perry visit the Fontainebleau in Miami, they see a man about Dick's age.

He could have been a "gambler or lawyer or maybe a gangster from Chicago." Whoever he was, he looked as though he knew the glories of money and power. A blonde who resembled Marilyn Monroe was kneading him with suntan oil, and his lazy, beringed hand reached for a tumbler of iced orange juice. All that belonged to him, Dick, but he would never have it. Why should that sonofabitch have everything while he had nothing? Why should that "big-shot bastard" have all the luck? With a knife in his hand, he, Dick, had power. Big-shot bastards like that had better be careful or he might "open them up and let a little of their luck spill on the floor."  

Dick's envy of the rich and powerful and his own desire to get rich quickly by any means, lead him to plan the crime against a wealthy and powerful man.

Floyd Wells, once a cell-mate of Dick's, had told Hickock about a former employer, Herb Clutter. Wells gave Dick a complete description of the Clutter home and directions to reach River Valley Farm. He even told Dick that Mr. Clutter had a safe in the office of the Clutter estate. With this valuable information in mind, all Dick needed was a particular type of partner--a "natural-born killer." He thought he had found his man in another cell-mate, Perry Smith, who had once confessed to having "fixed a guy ..."

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14 Ibid., p. 201.  
15 Ibid., p. 88.
a nigger . . . named King" near Las Vegas. Dick believed that he could harness Perry's killer instinct and use it to his own advantage, but he was mistaken because Perry did not kill for Dick; he killed because of the treatment that he had received all his life. The failure of Dick's plan, though, lay in his not knowing that Herb Clutter never kept money at his house, that he paid for everything by check. The entire "take" amounted to about fifty dollars. The plan turned out to be one enormous blunder, but as is revealed later, Dick's real plan included something more than robbery. He also intended to rape the Clutters' daughter.

In a statement that Dick wrote for his psychiatrist, he revealed his plan to rape Nancy Clutter and his subsequent feeling of shame:

Before I ever went to their house I knew there would be a girl there. I think the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl. Because I thought a lot about it. That is one reason why I never wanted to turn back when we started to. Even when I saw there was no safe. I did make some advances toward the Clutter girl when I was there. But Perry never gave me a chance. I hope no one finds this out but you, I haven't even told my lawyer. 16

Dick's and Perry's ideas of morality are quite different. While Perry kills the Clutters and feels no remorse, he cannot tolerate people "who can't control themselves sexually." Dick, on the other hand, fears the homicidal Perry and even looks down on him, but he conceals his shameful

16 Ibid., pp. 278-279.
feelings about "pubescent girls" with whom he has had several experiences. Neither of the young men is ashamed of stealing, though Dick does not want his parents to learn of his thefts. Surprisingly, Dick is the one who planned the Clutter robbery and kept talking about their leaving no witnesses, only "hair splattered all over walls," but Perry, who was hesitant about the scheme, is the one who actually does the killing. Neither feels any remorse about the crime itself, but both regret being caught. Their victims have no chance to regret anything.

Perry's killing of the Clutters may be attributed to Dick Hickock, the evil character of In Cold Blood. Dick is "Master Misery" to Perry in that he buys Perry's dreams of riches and success with the promise of an easy life—a promise that he cannot fulfill. He is Mr. Destronelli, Lazarus, and Miriam because he makes Perry see himself for what he really is. He brings out hidden fears of the lack of ability and education in the naive young man. Dick is a Miss Bobbit in his exploitation of other people. He tries to use Perry, but his plan is turned against him, and he hangs, alongside Perry, for the Clutter murders. He is like Idabel Thompsons in that he represents a masculine air that Perry can never attain, even with his weight-lifting and dare-devil motorcycle riding. Like Dr. Morris Ritz, Dick presents a picture of sex as being vulgar, yet somehow appealing because the innocent thinks that the attitude of
Dick and Ritz is that of the real man. Unlike the imaginative Perry, Dick dreams only of "blond chicken." Like the Reverend Mr. Buster, Dick is a hypocrite. He pretends to like Perry and to believe in him only because Perry can help him. Dick, unlike Perry, has full knowledge of what he is doing when the pair go to the Clutter house to rob and kill the family there. Perry recalls the crime as if he were dreaming or watching someone else, as in a movie. Dick remembers precisely what happened at every point before and during the murders and in the attempted escape afterwards. Just as in the relationship between Randolph and Joel, the evil character Dick tries to introduce the innocent Perry to evil. Dick is the one who plans and helps execute the crime "in cold blood."

Capote twists the focus of *In Cold Blood* away from the crime. He selects material about the killers which places them in a sympathetic light. All the background information, their poverty, mistreatment, and hardships, makes the reader feel sorry for them. Capote does not concentrate on the crime itself, and the reader finds himself wanting the killers to get away with the crime, even though he knows that this feeling is not right. The feeling of sympathy probably occurs because the reader comes to know Perry Smith and Dick Hickock so well. Everyone is taught to help others overcome problems like those that plague Dick and Perry. Today there are slum clearance programs, wars on poverty, and the drives
to get men to act as "big brothers" to poverty-stricken children. The leaders of today cry out for help, but the society still has in its midst the downtrodden, the ignorant, and the intimidated people—the kind of people who brought Hickock and Smith into the world.

The crime of In Cold Blood becomes a crime of society in Capote's point of view. Society spawned the evil that infected Richard Hickock. Hickock in turn, used the innocent Perry to evil purposes. Perry, when he finally is forced to see the evil that he had rejected, is crushed by the knowledge of Dick's evil and confesses his crime to the police. He is destroyed by his naivete and by the fears within himself. The themes of innocence and evil are brought together in In Cold Blood—distilled from the fiction and superimposed on the non-fiction. Capote's interpretation of life appears to be that the factor which makes a person innocent is that he does not become a part of society. He shuts out the outside world to avoid its taint.
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