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EN40ST2
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Ms. Smith

In Cold Blood
Truman Capote

In Cold Blood is a true story about the brutal murders of the Clutter family by Perry Smith and Richard "Dick" Hickock in 1959. It details the lives of the Clutter family prior to the murder and goes on to follow the aftermath of the situation including the police search/detective work, life in the community after the tragedy and the perpetrators' lives on the run for the six weeks between the murder and their capture. It also includes backstories on both Smith and Hickock and insights based on interviews Capote had with them, letters and such. Smith and Hickock are given away as the murderers in the beginning of the book and the remainder of it is not much but vast details; it's written more as a criminal report than a story.

The book is intended for educated people interested in true crime stories; it is of a formal style and written in third person with Truman as the narrator. It is a biographical profile written from a compilation of notes taken by Truman from interviews with members of the Holcomb community force, Smith, Hickock and other people involved with the case and/or the Clutter family. The story is written in chronological order, although it jumps from person to person and occasionally includes flashbacks of past events; these flashbacks are used to help the reader develop a better understanding of the events that occurred in the novel and the characters. The author was not personally involved in the case, but was a writer for *The New Yorker* whom asked him to write about it. However; he, with the help of Harper Lee, personally interviewed all of the people used in the novel and did the subsequent research.

Capote interviewed many people and researched the case thoroughly, writing over 8,000 pages of notes to use towards his book. All of the sources used in the novel were primary; Capote interviewed friends and employees of the Clutter family, members of the community, police and paramedics present at the crime scene, the lawyers, jury and judge involved in the trial and the murderers themselves. He also used letters, journal entries and records for his research. His research of Perry Smith was extensive and more was included of him, his mindset and his life than any other character. It appears that Capote has a certain bias towards the story, often portraying Hickock as a terrible person while portraying Smith as misunderstood victim of his



past, a man who actually "gave a damn" (45); Smith is portrayed as a character that we can feel sympathetic for.

Capote's purpose in writing the novel was to inform his audience about the details of the crime committed and the personalities and outcomes of both the community member and the murderers. There is not an argument presented, only facts. I think that the writing is honest and that the facts are accurate; however, I don't feel that there is much objective. It is made obvious that the crime committed was wrong but much insight is given towards Smith and his past and his mindset. I don't think that there was as much insight into Hickock. Smith committed the murders but he is almost, in a way, presented as a victim; Hickock is written as a purely evil person and his character isn't as developed as Smith's and does not go into as much depth.

The book did not omit any information but several ideas were more developed than others. All of the vital facts were included but the unnecessary information was used to make the reader feel biased. Aside from its flaws, it was a good book and a worthwhile read for anyone who likes crime stories. There was no message to take away from the book but it was still good despite being purely factual. It wasn't really thought provoking because everything that the reader needs to know is known from the beginning; however, the book did leave me wondering "why?" for a long time and even after I knew the answer to that question, I wanted to understand more of how a human being could be capable of cold blooded murder without remorse. It was strong in facts and research but the biased presentations of the characters really got to me. Because of the overdevelopment of Smith's character and the underdevelopment of Hickock's I would have to give it a three out of five.

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Works Cited

Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*. United States: Random House, Inc., 1993.

