Towards a Rhetoric of Fictionality in the Nonfiction Novel: A Study of Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood

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Al-Fatih journal

ISSN: 87521996 Year: 2008 Volume: 4 Issue: 36 Pages: 267-286
Publisher: Diyala University

Abstract

Although Capote’s notorious incorporation of purely fictionalized scenes in his seminal nonfiction novel In Cold Blood, subtitled A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences, (1965) has long been exposed and well documented, the substantial body of criticism produced on this issue is still haunted by what amount to a sort of illegitimacy fallacy. The incorporated elements are fictionalized scenes that range from few paragraphs to several pages. These are four in number. They all appear in the last part of the book which is entitled “The Corner.” The first scene depicts the sale of Nancy Clutters’s pet horse in the auctioning of the murdered family’s property. Capote radically changed the details of the sale for no obvious reason. Capote’s version of the sale in In Cold Blood goes like this:

“I hear fifty…fifty-five…seventy…”: the bidding was laggardly, nobody seemed really to want Babe, and the man who got her, a Mennonite farmer who said he might use her for plowing, paid seventy-five dollars. As he led her out of the corral, Sue Kidwell ran forward, she raised her hand as though to waving goodbye, but instead clasped it over her mouth. (1)