

# Factual and fictional: bias interpretation of reality in capote's in cold blood



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Nonfiction novels are a genre of book that employ all devices of a fictional piece, however all of the information is completely factual. Though legitimate, the integrity of the writer still can be called into question, depending on the portrayal of the facts. Truman Capote, being the first author to use this style of writing, was the first to twist a true story into his own. He was able to do this in *In Cold Blood* through his use of bias. Truman Capote shows bias in *In Cold Blood* through his selective characterization and attention to detail, yet this bias results in a more fair narrative overall.

One way Capote shows his bias in the novel throughout is his clear favoring of Perry over Dick. Capote characterizes Perry in a very positive manner compared to Dick, making readers feel sympathy for him. From the beginning, readers are led to believe that Perry is submissive to Dick. Perry follows what Dick tells him and rarely bothers speaking his own mind. This combined with the contrasting tones Capote uses between the two of them make readers see Perry in a more positive light. For example, using a sympathetic tone while speaking of Perry's childhood (98) while using a calm, yet humorous, tone just hours before Dick's execution to make him seem like a sociopath (339). Also, Capote highlights a scene during the murder in which Perry replies to Dick, " Uh-huh. But you'll have to kill me first" after Dick proposes the idea of raping Nancy (243). This makes readers view Perry as a hero for stopping Dick. Capote's favoring of Perry over Dick is one of the key ways he displays bias in *In Cold Blood* and also leads readers to question the integrity of his writing.

Specific details displayed throughout the novel sway the readers' opinions on who the criminals really are. Capote uses these details to instill his bias into <https://assignbuster.com/factual-and-fictional-bias-interpretation-of-reality-in-capotes-in-cold-blood/>

others. One detail from the murder that makes readers question the motives of the criminals, is how pillows are placed under the heads of the victims (64). This detail makes readers wonder why a murderer would go through the trouble of comfort, if they didn't care about the victim. This gives the appearance that Dick and Perry have compassion. Another thing that makes readers feel sympathy for the killers, is the explanation of their rough childhoods. Perry in particular, had it rough. He was in and out of orphanages, his mother was a drunk, and his father was flaky (132). This coupled with hints of their mental instability, for example, Dick's "emotional abnormality" (294) and Perry's "signs of severe mental illness" (296), pull an emotional response from readers. It makes readers pity the murderers, which typically is not the natural response in a situation like this. This twisting of classic roles makes the novel more fair to both sides.

The bias in favor of the criminals results in *In Cold Blood* being a more accurate portrayal of both sides of the story. In most murder mystery stories, readers are made to feel more sympathy towards the victims of the crime. The difference in *In Cold Blood* is that readers not only feel sympathy for the Clutter family, they also relate and hurt along with Dick and Perry. He does this in order to make readers think on a deeper level about capital punishment. Capote evokes these emotions from readers in several ways. One way in which he does this, is he focuses heavily on the pain the criminals face after the murdering. We see Perry "studying" papers at a dinner, reading the article about the murder "fifty times" and questioning what it says (88). Perry is visibly anxious in this moment- he obviously is feeling some remorse. Also, later on, after Dick gets a few drinks in him he

exclaims to Perry, “ What about Dad? I feel- oh, Jesus, he’s such a good guy. And my mother-” (99). Dick worries about his family and what they will think of him for his crime. Another way Capote pulls readers to feel for the two of them, are by sharing their back story. The story speaks of how Perry had an alcoholic mother who was “ strangled to death on her own vomit,” and two of his siblings committed suicide (110). This is a tragic situation for anyone to be in, and it makes readers sympathize for Perry.

Capote makes *In Cold Blood* a more fair portrayal of the murders by sharing his bias with readers. Capote got up close and personal with the case, allowing him to see all sides of the story and to provide the world with a new perspective. Though his bias is still called into question, it does not change the fact that everything he wrote is completely factual. The mix of fact and bias is what makes this novel as interesting as it is.