

“In Cold Blood” by Truman Capote [B2]

Dopo una serie di romanzi di successo, il celebre autore cambiò genere con questa cronaca del massacro di un'intera famiglia nel profondo degli Stati Uniti. L'opera divenne un punto di riferimento del nuovo giornalismo, una svolta nel “true crime”.



Born in 1924, in New Orleans, Truman Capote was a novelist, [scriptwriter](#) and pioneer of New Journalism, an influential style of non-fiction writing incorporating literary techniques and a subjective viewpoint. After producing a series of acclaimed novels — Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948), The Grass Harp (1951) and Breakfast at Tiffany's (1958) — Capote decided to try something different. He described In Cold Blood as a “non-fiction novel”: a [blend](#) of interviews and research with fictionalised scenes and dialogue. Capote wanted to understand why some people choose to kill.

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

The author spent six years researching and writing his book, [aided](#) by his friend Harper Lee (author of [To Kill a Mockingbird](#)). His precise prose explores the lives and deaths of those impacted by a brutal multiple murder

in the quiet, rural town of Holcomb, Kansas — an [unlikely](#) location for such an ugly crime. **“Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans – in fact, few Kansans – had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there.”** “Fino a una mattina di metà novembre nel 1959, pochi americani, anzi, pochi kansasiani avevano mai sentito parlare di Holcomb. Come le acque del fiume, come gli automobilisti sull’autostrada e come i treni gialli che serpeggiano lungo le rotaie della Santa Fé, il dramma, sotto forma di avvenimento eccezionale, non si era mai fermato laggiù.”

DREAMING BIG

But drama does arrive, in the shape of two violent young criminals: Perry Smith and Dick Hickock. [Former](#) prison [cellmates](#). The men plan to rob a local farming family: Herbert and Bonnie Clutter and their two teenage children. Instead they leave behind four dead bodies and a community trying to comprehend what has happened. As a shocked café owner tells Capote, such a crime seems inconceivable: **“But who hated the Clutters? I never heard a word against them; they were about as popular as a family can be, and if something like this could happen to them, then who’s safe, I ask you? One old man sitting here that Sunday, he put his finger right on it, the reason nobody can sleep; he said, ‘All we’ve got out here are our friends. There isn’t anything else.’”** Ma chi odiava i Clutter? Non ho mai sentito dire una parola contro di loro; erano benvenuti da tutti, e se una cosa del genere ha potuto accadere a loro, chi è al sicuro allora, domando io. Quella domenica, qui, c’era un vecchio che ha messo il dito proprio sulla piaga: la ragione per cui nessuno riesce a dormire; ha detto: «Tutti quelli che abbiamo qui sono nostri amici. Non ci sono altri.»”

OBSESSION

The investigation is [led](#) by Al Dewey, a former local sheriff who knew the Clutters personally. But even with the help of a team of experienced

detectives, Dewey remains baffled, with no clear motive or meaningful leads presenting themselves. For the former-sheriff, the investigation becomes an obsession: **"I've seen some bad things, I sure as hell have. But nothing as vicious as this. However long it takes, it may be the rest of my life, I'm going to know what happened in that house: the why and the who."**

"Perché di brutte cose ne ho viste, accidenti se ne ho viste. Ma niente di così malvagio. Ma dovessi anche impiegarmi il resto della mia vita, saprò cosa accadde in quella casa: chi e perché.»"

MOTIVES**

Smith and Hickock head for Mexico with dreams of wealth and women. But their money soon runs out and their relationship becomes strained. The men have to live with the enormity of their crimes. While Hickock is shown to be an opportunist, Smith seems unsure of his own motive for the killings: **"I don't know why..., he said, as if holding it to the light, as if angling it now here, now there. 'It wasn't... the fear of being identified. I was willing to take that gamble. And it wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They 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.'"**

«Non so perché,» continuò, come se l'esponesse alla luce, girandola da una parte e dall'altra. [...] Ma non si trattava [...] della paura di venire identificato. Ero disposto a correre quel rischio. E non era per qualcosa che i Clutter avessero fatto. Non mi avevano mai fatto nulla di male. Come certa altra gente. Certa gente che mi ha messo in croce per tutta la vita. Forse è solo che i Clutter erano quelli che dovevano pagare per tutti.»"

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

A compelling, haunting, genre-defying story, In Cold Blood was a massive critical and commercial success and paved the way for a true crime boom that shows no sign of abating. The book, however, it took its toll on an exhausted Capote, who could not complete a novel after it. In Cold Blood has been adapted for screen three times, with the late Philip Seymour Hoffman winning an Oscar for his portrayal of the author in Capote.

Glossary

- **To Kill a Mockingbird** = Il buio oltre la siepe
- **head for** = dirigersi
- **compelling** = avvincente
- **haunting** = inquietante
- **leads** = piste
- **portrayal** = ritratto
- **blend** = combinazione, miscela
- **aided** = aiutare
- **unlikely** = inverosimile
- **runs out** = consumarsi
- **strained** = tesa
- **abating** = diminuire
- **took its toll** = mettere a dura prova
- **scriptwriter** = sceneggiatore
- **Former** = ex
- **cellmates** = compagni di cella
- **led** = condurre
- **baffled** = sconcertare
- **paved the way** = aprire la strada
- **late** = defunto