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**THE MIRROR OF A WRITER'S SENSIBILITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF TRUMAN CAPOTE'S NARRATOR IN
*OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS***

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*OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS***

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**The mirror of a writer's sensibility: An analysis of Truman Capote's narrator in
*Other Voices, Other Rooms***

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There should be no boundaries to human endeavor. We are all different. However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. While there's life, there is hope.

- Stephen Hawking

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RESUMO

Truman Capote, autor, roteirista e dramaturgo Americano, foi um dos principais escritores americanos de ficção do período pós-guerra, conhecido por receber ampla notoriedade pelo seu romance best-seller *In Cold Blood*, de 1965, por um estilo de escrita que misturava literatura e jornalismo. No entanto, o trabalho de Capote se estende além do romance antes mencionado. O autor, que se tornaria famoso por sua personalidade também, revelou grande talento como escritor desde muito jovem, trabalhando com temas muito relacionados à sua vida pessoal. Durante minhas leituras de seus trabalhos, eu pude perceber que o narrador que Capote criava trazia o leitor muito mais próximo à história. O propósito da minha dissertação é fazer uma análise do narrador de Capote para poder discutir suas técnicas específicas. Para tal, escolhi trabalhar com a teoria da narratologia, que não apenas é o estudo da narrativa e da estrutura de um texto, mas também sobre como ele afeta nossas percepções como leitores. Através de uma análise de aspectos como focalização e discurso do narrador, minha intenção foi traçar uma relação entre o narrador de Capote com seu autor implícito para poder entender como isso afeta nossa experiência de leitura e seu relacionamento com o leitor. Para essa análise, eu escolhi o primeiro romance publicado de Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), porque acredito que conta uma história que pareceu surgir de emoções altamente reprimidas do autor sobre sua infância e crescimento. Além disso, tentarei identificar onde elementos biográficos podem ter inspirado alguns dos eventos presentes na história, na tentativa de estabelecer uma conexão com os eventos de sua vida real e o quanto elas interferiam em sua ficção. A teoria que em destaque nesse trabalho são os trabalhos da autora Mieke Bal (2009) e de Herman & Vervaeck (2005), para poder trazer os termos que ajudam a continuar com a discussão. Ao fim desta análise, espero mostrar o que há por baixo de um narrador cuidadosamente construído, e que o leitor seja capaz de perceber Truman Capote por mais do que sua famosa personalidade, mas também como um escritor cuidadoso e focado que era apaixonado por sua arte.

Palavras-chaves: Literatura Norte-Americana. Truman Capote. Narratologia.

ABSTRACT

American novelist, screenwriter and playwright Truman Capote was one of the leading American authors of fiction of the post-war period, known for receiving wide notoriety for his 1965 best seller *In Cold Blood*, for a style of writing that mixed literature and journalism. However, Capote's works extend beyond the aforementioned novel. The author, who would eventually become famous for his personality as well, revealed great talent as a writer since a very young age, working with themes closely related to his personal life. During my readings of his works, I was able to perceive that the narrator Capote creates brings the reader much closer to the story. The purpose of this thesis is to carry out an analysis of Capote's narrator in order to discuss his particular techniques. In order to do that, I chose to work with the theory of narratology, which is not only the study of narrative and the narrative structure of a text, but also of how it affects our perceptions as readers. Through an analysis of aspects such as focalization and the narrator's discourse, my intention was to trace a relation between the narrator with Capote's implied author in order to understand how this affects the reading experience and the relationship with the reader. For this analysis, I chose Capote's first published novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), because I believe that it tells a story that seem to come from the highly suppressed emotions of the author about his childhood and growing up. I will also attempt to identify where biographical elements might have inspired some of the events that appear in the story, attempting to establish connection to the events of his real life and how much it interfered in his fiction. As to the theory that underlines this work, I chose the works of Mieke Bal (2009) and Herman & Vervaeck (2005), in order to bring light to terms that help further the discussion. By the end of this analysis, I hope to show what lies beneath a carefully constructed narrator, and that the reader will be able to perceive Truman Capote for more than his famous personality, but also as a careful and focused writer that was passionate about his craft.

Keywords: North-American Literature. Truman Capote. Narratology.

*To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not
what it's about, but the inner music the words
make.*

Truman Capote

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	TABLE OF IMAGES	9
	INTRODUCTION	10
1	EARLY YEARS	16
2	NARRATOLOGY	23
2.1	MIEKE BAL'S <i>NARRATOLOGY: INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF NARRATIVE</i>	23
2.1.1	The Narrative text and the narrator.....	25
2.1.2	Focalization	26
2.2	LUC HERMAN & BART VERVAECK'S <i>HANDBOOK OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS</i>	28
2.2.1	Author and Narrator	29
2.2.2	Narrator and reader	30
3	THE NOVEL	31
4	FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	48
	REFERENCES	51

TABLE OF IMAGES

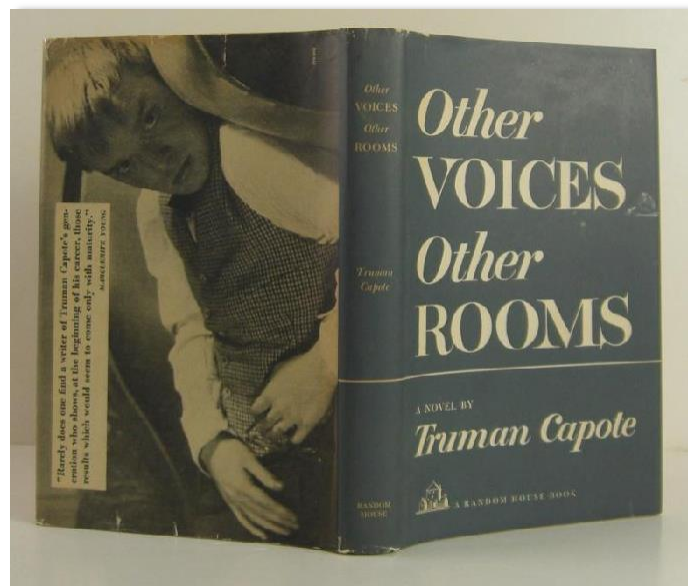
1	First edition of Other Voices, Other Rooms, published by Random House in 1948. Available on the internet at: [https://www.vialibri.net/item_pg_i/436114-1948-capote-truman-other-voices-other-rooms.htm]. Access on July 1, 2016	p.10
2	Picture of Truman Capote by Harold Halma. Available on the internet at: [https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/63683782206741061/]. Access on July 1, 2016	p.11

INTRODUCTION

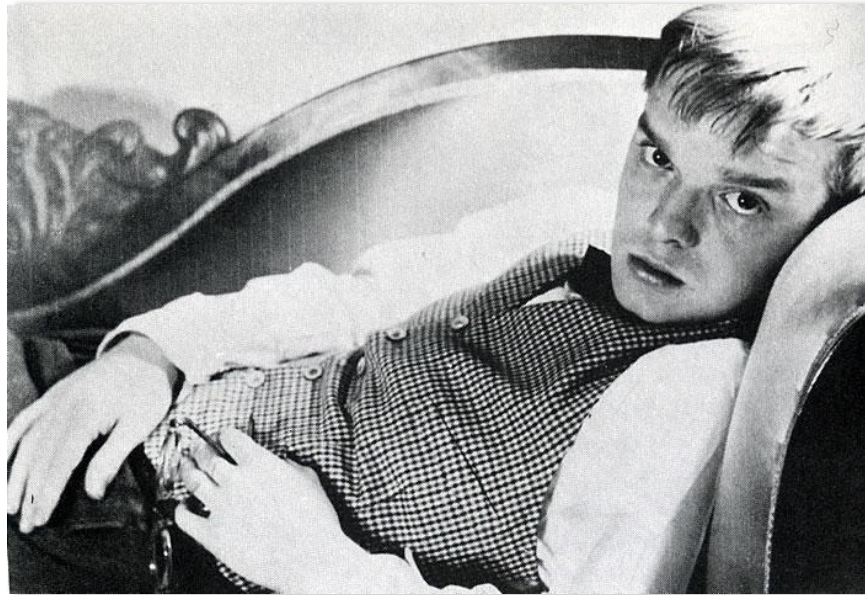
Truman Capote first attracted public interest as a precocious prodigy of fiction in the mid 1940's. He would later become known not only for his short stories and novels, but also for his 1965 best seller novel *In Cold Blood*. According to David Lodge in *Art of Fiction*, Truman Capote formally established the genre of the 'non-fiction novel' by coining the term, which is characterized by real historical characters and actual events put together and written using storytelling techniques of fiction.

However, my main interest concerning Capote is not this famed genre which he developed so well. Beyond *In Cold Blood*, there are a number of other fictional works by Capote, works of diverse themes (such as sexual confusion, the grotesque, loss, coming of age, etc.), some of these closely connected to the author's childhood experiences and reworked into novels and stories that reveal great talent. As I shall refer to on the following pages, Capote's literary career started way before the advent of *In Cold Blood*.

Capote's literary reputation was strongly related to the reputation of the persona he created. Gerald Clarke, who wrote in *Capote: A Biography* (2006), refers to a famous portrait by photographer Harold Halma featured on the back cover of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*:



Img. 1 First edition of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, published in New York by Random House in 1948.



Img. 2 Truman Capote, by Harold Halma

He mentions it is illustrative of the ‘aura’ Capote was devising around his public figure. The picture has Truman in a ‘suggestive, insinuating’ pose, stirring more talk than the author’s actual prose, making some people feel quite offended and outraged. Truman always wanted attention, but seeing that the picture had overshadowed his work, he tried to disclaim responsibility for it, stating that Halma had caught him off guard. Halma, on the other hand, dismissed the claims saying that this was not true, since Capote himself staged the whole scenario. Clarke (2006) argued that: ‘Photographs had always served him well, however, and if that one made him both a target and a figure of fun, it did at least achieve its primary purpose: it gave him not only the literary, but also the public personality he had always wanted.’ (CLARKE, p. 159).

Capote’s desire to become famous eventually came true in the 1950s. During this decade, he became the darling of New York society, traveling amongst an eclectic group of social circles, befriending authors, critics, Hollywood and theatre celebrities, royalty and members of high society, both in the United States and abroad. Openly homosexual and living with addictions, soon enough Truman Capote’s persona would eventually become bigger than his craft.

Nevertheless, when reading his fiction, it becomes clear that Capote’s work goes beyond all these popular media displays. From the very beginning of his career, Capote has always been concerned with his fiction. Therefore he polished his texts, in terms of format, bringing one story after the other into line, stories which he submitted to magazines. In an

interview for *The Paris Review* in 1957, Capote revealed he was a writer concerned with the style of writing, always attempting to perfect his own, saying that he considered it to be ‘the mirror of an artist’s sensibility’ and admitting to being obsessed with, for example, the placing of commas. Notwithstanding Capote’s concerns, his work seems to have benefited from such diligence and indicates his constant striving for improvement. Orville Prescott wrote for the *New York Times* about Capote’s first novel saying:

(...) it is impossible not to succumb to the potent magic of his writing. [In *Other Voices, Other Rooms*] there are scenes as sharp and suggestive as anything in recent fiction; a wry humor that flashes forth in the most unexpected places; a bizarre atmosphere and spiritual tension as taut as a banjo string. (PRESCOTT, 1948).

Furthermore, it is clear that much of Capote’s personal experiences were the basis for his fiction. Although, evidently, it is in the working of his writing that he transformed what could be straightforward autobiography into fictional works that may touch the reader in his or her own experiences. Regarding this transposition from the autobiographical to fiction, one of Capote’s most painful experiences is mentioned by Clarke (2006): Capote, the child of a broken marriage, dealt with many troubles growing up. His mother, not suited for motherhood, abandoned him often to fulfill her own dreams and left him to be raised by female cousins, a fact that is portrayed in more than one of his pieces of fiction.

An avid reader and writer by the age of 11, Capote started his career by writing short stories. His first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, published in 1948, is said to be semi-autobiographical. After this publication, the promotion and controversy around it launched Capote to fame, presenting a pattern that would follow the author’s career: his personal publicity and the persona he created for himself would usually (and often unfortunately) upstage his fictional work, as the author John Berendt argues that:

He had already become something of a personality in New York, and a very strange personality at that. He stood a diminutive five feet three inches, had a childlike face, blond bangs, a pixyish manner, a knack for drawing attention to himself, and an unflagging determination to be famous (BERENDT, pg. 6).

Despite all of this, as has been mentioned above, Capote gave a great deal of importance to working with his literary text. This can be corroborated by the fact that even long before he wrote the famed *In Cold Blood*, he was already concerned with specific

narrative resources. He was a very keen observer, paid a great deal of attention to details and created beautiful descriptions, as John Berendt states:

Capote's impressionist prose style creates an atmosphere of dreamlike elegance (...) His narrative glows with an abundance of colors, some of which seem to have been invented on the spot.(...) Capote fills the page with evocative images one after the other, from fairy-tale sweet to downright eerie' (BERENDT, pg. 8)

My individual fascination with the work of Truman Capote started with the reading of his 1958 novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. It was adapted to film in 1961 by screenwriter George Axelrod and directed by Blake Edwards, with Audrey Hepburn as the starring role of Holly Golightly. I was already a huge fan of the film, and it was during my undergraduate years that I came across Capote's works for the first time. After *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, I also read a few of his short stories, and became intrigued and enchanted by the way the writer constructed images. I immediately fell in love with a narrator that made me feel so close to the story. Thus, I decided that a careful analysis of the narrator and its role in the narrative constructed by Capote would be an interesting study, one that I decided to carry out with *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, a work that has not received a great deal of attention and is much less studied than his other novels.

Hence, for the purpose of this thesis, I will carry out an analysis of Capote's narrator in order to discuss his particular narrative techniques. In order to do that, I make use of the theory of narratology, which is not only the study of narrative and the narrative structure of a text, but also of how it affects our perceptions as readers. Through an analysis of aspects such as focalization and the narrator's discourse, I intend to trace a relation between the narrator with Capote's implied author in order to understand how this affects the reading experience and the relationship with the reader.

For this analysis, I chose *Other Voices, Other Rooms* not only because it is Capote's first novel, but because I believe that it tells a story that apparently comes from the highly suppressed emotions of the author about his childhood and growing up. Capote's preoccupation with the exercise of writing is a strong characteristic of his work and it was highly praised, as can be seen in the following comment: '(...) few [first novels] are more artistically exciting, more positive proof of the arrival of a new writer of substantial talent' (PRESCOTT, 1948).

Through the analysis of the text in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, I will also attempt to identify where biographical elements might have inspired some events in the stories.

Although the main focus of this research is the text itself, I attempt to establish a connection (albeit speculative) of how much Capote's personal life interfered in his fiction. I reckon that the author and the narrator of Capote are very close, thus the importance of his biography. Nevertheless, the study of the voice of the author will be carried out through an analysis of the fictional narrator he creates.

As to the theory that underlines this work, I chose the works of Mieke Bal (2009) and Herman & Vervaeck (2005). In making clear that I do not forget the primary sources of the field of study of narratology, I felt that these particular authors (although compiling on ideas from other theorists) focus more on the aspects which I intend to explore in this study. Bal (2009) develops an interesting take on the concept of focalization, while Herman & Vervaeck's (2005) work is mostly focused on the reader, which I hope will also contribute to my analysis presented here.

Narratology, as Bal (2009) says 'is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that „tell a story'. Such a theory helps to understand, analyze, and evaluate narratives.' (loc. 265). Bal (2009) believes that in order to analyze a text, the reader would have to distinguish its different layers, in order to explain the different or particular effects that one text might have on its readers. Bal's (2009) *Narratology* explains the fundamental concepts for analysis of narrative systematically and it is also permeated with the technical terms that are necessary for the analysis of a text. Her book analyzes several selections of literary works, therefore, showing how all of the concepts are applied practically. The author has a systematic approach of narrative techniques, and most importantly, their transmission and reception. For my analysis, I will be mainly using Bal's (2009) discussion about focalization –which I will further explore on chapter 2 – to talk about the narrator of Capote's stories.

Herman & Vervaeck's (2005) *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* provides an overview of the main currents in narratology, from theoretical discussions to the work of other authors such as Seymour Chatman and Gérard Genette. The book is focused on exploring the distinction of various narrators with what they actually tell us (the importance of analyzing form and content). These authors' focus is on the reader and how this reader receives and can be affected by different uses of narrative resources used by the author.

One important aspect Herman and Vervaeck (2005) discuss is that a complete separation between author and narrator appears to be inadequate. Their concept of *implied author* says that '(the implied author) is responsible for the world-view emanating from a narrative (...) on the basis of word choice, humor, and the manner in which characters are introduced' (pg. 17). Given that Capote as an author and Capote as the creator of the narrative are both tied together and inextricably present in the narration, I believe that the concepts

developed in *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis* will help me further analyze Capote's presence as an implied author.

The first chapter of this thesis introduces Truman Capote's early years in order to enlighten us on how they came to shape the author's fiction. The second chapter will describe the importance of narrative studies and bring light to concepts used in this field that will be of use for my analysis. The third chapter will deal with *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and how the choices made by the author for this work indicate how closely related Capote and the narrator were. Through my own perceptions, my intention is to demonstrate how the type of narrator selected to narrate events, emotions and outcomes bring the reader closer to the story, and to elucidate some of the techniques used to achieve the final effect of the novel. Although the work is not indicated – but was admitted, as will be discussed further on - as being autobiographical, the voice Capote uses is constructed in a personal and unique fashion, appearing in the narrative choices he makes. Thus, though the title of the novel is *OTHER Voices, OTHER Rooms*, (uppercase added) one can speculate that this 'otherness' in the voices mentioned is, in fact, closer to Capote's sensibilities than a superficial reading might render.

I hope that by the end of my analysis, the reader will perceive Truman Capote not only as the huge and notorious personality he was, but as a careful and focused writer who might not have left behind a hefty expansion of works, but was passionate and involved in the craft of writing.

1 EARLY YEARS

My major regret in life is that my childhood was unnecessarily lonely.

Truman Capote

In this chapter I will provide a brief overview of Truman Capote's childhood and the life of his parents, in order to analyze the elements comparable to the narrative of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. I will base this brief summary on the work of American author Gerald Clarke, who wrote *Capote: A biography* originally published in 1988. The book, later on turned into the Academy Award winner film *Capote* (2005), was based on hundreds of hours of interviews not only with Capote himself but with almost everyone who knew him.

Truman Streckfus Persons, son to Lillie Mae Faulk and Archulus Persons, was born on the 30th of September, 1924, in New Orleans, Louisiana, United States. The news of her pregnancy did not come as a happy discovery for Lillie, the young woman who at that point was in an unhappy marriage to a man she came to despise.

Arch, as he was called, was two weeks from turning twenty-six years old and Lillie Mae was seventeen. The couple's honeymoon was cut short due to Arch's lack of money, and Lillie was sent back to her home in Monroeville, Alabama – with four of her siblings and more cousins – where she stayed for five weeks, while Arch tried to raise money. Coming back to rescue Lillie Mae, according to Clarke (2006), Arch was greeted by her suspicious sister, Jennie, who told him he was not to show up there ever again: ‘„Get out and don't ever darken my door again!’ she screamed. ‘„Don't even put your foot in my yard!’ Only after he had spent the night in the Purafore Hotel did she relent and allow him to join his wife in her old back bedroom.’(CLARKE, pg.5).

What led Lillie Mae to regret their marriage was the fact that she had married Arch precisely to get away from a crowded house, for she had her eyes set on more distant horizons. Unfortunately, Arch spent too much money - when he had any - and borrowed too much when he did not. Even when he had found himself a job, Lillie was not convinced he was a changed man, as the term goes, so the pregnancy ‘seemed like a sentence to prison, something that would make her mistake in marrying him permanent and irrevocable.’ (CLARKE, pg. 6). Thus, she decided to have an abortion, something that was not easily done in the middle of the 1920's. After much stalling and excuses from Arch, Lillie was eventually

too advanced in her pregnancy for an abortion to be considered, so she ended up deciding to have his child.

Despite the effort to maintain her marriage for Truman's sake, Lillie Mae gave up any pretense of faithfulness and had other men in her life. Arch knew about all of it, but decided there was nothing he could do apart from completely separating from her. Lillie continued her affairs even though she offered Arch support in everything else and always stuck by him, helping him whenever she could, according to Clarke (2006): 'Though their times together grew progressively shorter, neither mentioned divorce; both of them seemed content with their civilized arrangement.' (CLARKE, pg. 14).

Between all of the hustle, Truman feared he would be deserted by his parents:

When he was with them, they would sometimes lock him in their hotel room at night, instructing the staff not to let him out even if he screamed, which, in his fright, he would often do. 'Eventually,' he recalled, 'I would become so exhausted that I would just throw myself on the bed or on the floor until they came back. Every day was a nightmare, because I was afraid that they would leave me when it turned dark. I had an intense fear of being abandoned, and I remember practically all of my childhood as being lived in a state of constant tension and fear.' (CLARKE, pg. 14).

Still, neither mother nor father were willing to be a full-time parent, so they would leave Truman with Arch's widowed mother or with Lillie's relations in Monroeville, where by the age of six Truman was left for good, and his fears indeed came to be reality.

The household where he stayed was very characteristic to the South of the U.S, very peculiar to the time with 'an atmosphere heavy with small secrets and ancient resentments.' (CLARKE, pg. 15). There, Truman lived with four cousins: Bud the oldest, kept to himself; Sook, who took care of the house and was known for making medicines; Jennie, who supported the family, and the youngest, Callie. Truman used to be around Sook, who was the oldest, the most, and would tread around the woods helping her gather ingredients for the medicines she used to make, as well as pecans, for the fruitcakes she would bake around Christmas time¹.

But Truman's real companion at that time was Harper Lee, the next-door neighbor's youngest daughter. Harper – or Nelle, was the tomboy of the block and could beat up most of the boys her age or even older, Truman being her favorite target. Nevertheless, this did not stop them from becoming friends, who found in each other not only true friendship but, as Clarke (2006) says, a common anguish: 'They both bore the bruises of parental rejection, and

¹ This was the inspiration behind his short story *A Christmas Story*

they both were shattered by loneliness. Neither had many other real friends. Nelle was too rough for most other girls, and Truman was too soft for most other boys.’ (CLARKE, pg. 22). Lillie would often send him preppy, very formal clothes, and people often said his white-blond hair and sky-blue eyes made him pretty enough to be a girl, thus, often he was regarded as a ‘sissy’ (regarded as effeminate, feeble or cowardly).

Nevertheless, Truman was a very adoring and sweet child, much loved by his cousins who, according to Clarke (2006) called him ‘the sunshine of our home’. But it seemed Truman was not happy, since his own descriptions of his life in Monroeville were almost grim, and Clarke (2006) mentions that Callie and Jennie might have been a bit surprised at how negative they were remembered: ‘Compared with Sook, both Callie and Jennie were viewed as cold and unloving, as purse-mouthed and pinchpenny spinsters’ (CLARKE, pg. 23). And despite all the care from his cousins, Lillie’s sporadic visits and his father’s disappointing appearances, nothing could replace the role of his parents together, making an effort to take care of him in their own home.

If Truman rarely saw his parents, they saw each other even less. By the fall of 1930, after a series of unfortunate events, – such as Archie tricking her into driving a carload of bootleg liquor into Monroeville - Lillie Mae decided she wanted out of the marriage. However, there was a catch: up until then, she had never been able to support herself and depended fully on Arch so as not go back to relying on Jennie. She then decided to take up studying again, and tried for the Elizabeth Arden School of Beauty in New York City, where she gained a scholarship. Arch only consented because he had a brother living in the city who could keep an eye on her, and since he had recently come into some money, he promised to send her an allowance of forty dollars a week for expenses.

The course was set to last for three months, when she should head back to Monroeville, though Lillie Mae knew she would try her best to stay. As expected, Arch was soon having trouble with money again, and the checks he sent Lillie started to bounce back. She then took up on a job in a restaurant on lower Broadway, where most of her gain went towards supporting Truman back in Alabama.

Right after Lillie took up residence in New York for good, she encountered an old affair, Joseph Garcia Capote. They had met six years before, when Joseph, the son of a colonel in the Spanish Army, had come to the United States to look for a job. At the time, Lillie was not only married but had a lover, and Joseph soon married a secretary and went up north, where he still remained in contact with Lillie. When they met again, they picked up their romance where they had left it back in 1924.

Around this time, Joe payed for her to go south and end her marriage with Arch for good; she therefore went back, telling her estranged husband that she wanted a divorce so she could get married to another man. Under the terms of the divorce, Lillie had custody of Truman for nine months of the year and Arch for the other three. Unfortunately, this was merely a paper agreement, seeing as neither of them fulfilled the role of full-time parent: Truman remained in Monroeville and his parents would only show up occasionally, just as they did before.

About a year later, in 1932, Lillie Mae went to Monroeville to take her son to New York. Joe was a very indulgent stepfather and spoiled the boy a great deal. Lillie May went for full custody at the beginning of 1933, and despite Arch's struggle, she won in court. By 1934, Lillie had filed for Joe's official adoption of Truman, renaming him Truman Garcia Capote.

Being young, all that Truman wanted was to be with his mother living up north. But now, he missed his times and family in Monroeville. Soon he discovered that the woman he adored was not real:

For several years before he joined her, he had known Lillie May only as a visitor, an adored relation who would suddenly appear, awing him with her beauty and glamour, and then disappear just as abruptly, leaving behind, like a whisper on the air, the promise that someday she would take him with her. From those tantalizing glimpses his busy mind had constructed a woman more of fiction than of fact. Much as he had done with Arch, he had turned Lillie Mae into a character out of one of his storybooks, someone who would transport him to a more romantic and exciting world, a place where he would be loved, protected and ceaselessly admired. (CLARKE, pg. 39).

Living with his mother was completely disappointing and he felt betrayed by her. As for Lillie, she could not be better; Joe and her were madly in love and appeared to have the best of everything: weekends away, travels and fancy nightclubs. 'She was exactly where she wanted to be, doing precisely what she wanted to do, in the company of the only man she wanted to do it with.' (CLARKE, p. 40). This transformation also came with a new name, more fitting to her new cosmopolitan life: Nina.

The only regret of Nina's new life was not being able to give the man she loved a child. After coming to New York, Nina had two miscarriages, and in one of them, she nearly lost her life. 'I think it did something to her head, because she was never the same afterward. She really wanted to have a child with him', said Truman (CLARKE, pg. 41).

Concerning one of Clarke's interviews with Capote, he mentions that Truman refers to Nina as being the single worst person of his life. She continued to dump him onto other

people and seemed to regard him with ambivalence: she loved him but, at the same time, showed that she did not love him. She looked at Truman more as a figure resembling his father than as an individual that was her son, or more like a poor substitute for the child she really wanted to have had with Joe. Although Joe tried to be a good stepfather, Truman would often scold and mock him. Even though Nina did not like this behavior, ‘what she found embarrassing and intolerable, and what she could not accept was something he could do nothing about: his effeminate, girlish behavior.’ (p.42)

With the passing of the years, the differences between Truman and the other boys became more pronounced:

(...) he remained small, and pretty as a china doll, and his mannerisms, little things like the way he walked or held himself, started to look odd, unlike those of other boys. Even his voice began to sound strange, peculiarly babylike and artificial, as if he had unconsciously decided that that part of him, the only part he could not stop from maturing, would remain fixed in boyhood forever, reminding him of happier and less confusing times. His face and body belatedly matured, but his way of speaking never did. (CLARKE, pg. 42).

In spite of how others saw him, Truman was the one who was most aware that there was something different about him. Nina took him to two different psychiatrists, but was not too pleased with the results (it did not turn him ‘right’), so she gave up on that. She wanted a remedy for it, simple as that. ‘She wanted him to be an ordinary fellow, straight in every way. But Truman was reluctant to be an ordinary fellow. He had to be himself’, said Joe (pg. 43).

In the fall of 1933, Truman was enrolled at the Trinity School, one of New York’s most prestigious schools for boys. Trinity was then a High Episcopal school, driven to send its students to the biggest universities of the country. Truman’s performance started on a good average, but with the passing of time his grades dropped considerably. The problems he had at home were starting to reflect on his education and it was clear to the school administrators and teachers that he was very disturbed, having witnessed temper tantrums he had at school. Nina had called the school for help and did not find any sympathy from them. In fact, one of the teachers was not particularly helpful at all:

The teacher would sometimes walk him home, Truman said, stopping on the way at a movie theater, the Olympia, on upper Broadway. They would sit in the privacy of the back row, and while the teacher fondled him, Truman would masturbate the teacher (CLARKE, pg. 44).

Nina did not know about such trips to the movie, but it was clear for everyone to see that Truman was not becoming the ordinary boy she wanted him to be, so she decided to send him to military school, after three years at Trinity. The teachers at Trinity and even Joe could not think of a worse thing for her to do to him, but in the fall of 1936 she enrolled him at St. John's Military Academy, a now extinct also Episcopal school in Ossining, New York. This change of scenery did not go as Nina expected, for the school did the exact opposite of what she expected (turning him into a man) and encouraged Truman to manifest his homosexuality even more: 'The smallest and prettiest boy in his class, Truman was looked upon as sexual prey by several cadets-the tough, manly types he was supposed to emulate-and when the lights went out, he was occasionally forced into some stronger boy's bed' (CLARKE, pg. 45). By the end of the school year, she realized that and sent him back to Trinity.

In the midst of several temper attacks and a bit of a snotty attitude, Truman barely passed the courses he took at St. John's but had already decided what he would become: a writer. He had decided that a few years before,

'For some reason I began to read in Alabama and discovered I loved it,' he said. 'Then one day, when I was nine or ten, I was walking along the road, kicking stones, and I realized that I wanted to be a writer, an artist. How did it happen? That's what I ask myself. My relatives were nothin', dirt-poor farmers. I don't believe in possession, but something took over inside me, some little demon that made me a writer. How else can it be explained?' (CLARKE, pg. 48-49).

Although Truman's life wasn't filled with a literary background, Clarke points to the fact that it did provide him with 'a literary viewpoint, a way of looking at people as characters in a drama and a way of viewing life itself as a tale to be unfolded' (pg. 49). Therefore, when Truman got back to Trinity he knew exactly what he wanted to do and discarded everything else. Few of his works from that time were saved by his Trinity teacher, John E. Langford, but it was simple to see that even when in eighth grade, Capote already demonstrated a most particular way of expressing himself:

Truman is self-consciously reaching for literary effects – a woman does not say something, she ejaculates; a man does not smile, he smirks in delight – but they move swiftly, with a small measure of grace, and so far as can be judged on such slim evidence, he is trying to give his work shape as well as size (CLARKE, pg. 50).

Around June 1939, the Capotes left New York for Greenwich, Connecticut. Truman settled himself just as easily as he had done before and went on to the Greenwich High

School, perfecting his writing and making a mark of his flamboyant personality, the beginning of the creation of his famous persona. As a consequence of his evolving personality, along the later years Nina and Truman's relationship would only get worse, with Nina developing an addiction to alcohol and still not accepting Truman's nature, while Truman clearly showed he was what she feared all along – a homosexual.

With this chapter, I intended briefly cover a portion of Capote's life in order to contextualize the connections I will make of this period of his life to his narrative in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Around 1944, after being fired from a job at *The New Yorker*, Truman decided to become a full-time writer, and went back to Monroeville to write. The memories of the past suddenly took over while wandering around Hatter's Mill – where he had learned how to swim and where he was bitten by a cottonmouth moccasin² – Truman set aside the manuscript he was writing, which would be called *Summer Crossing*³ and started '(...) an entirely new book, a book not about the sleek and smooth world of Fifth Avenue society, which he scarcely knew at all, but about a boy growing up, lost, lonely, starving for love, in a backwoods town in Alabama' (CLARKE, pg. 80). These early years of Capote's life would inspire him to write about his experience in fiction, using and honing techniques that would eventually turn him into the talented writer he became.

² A venomous snake found in the southeastern of the United States

³ Posthumously published in 2005

2 NARRATOLOGY

Narratology, in general, is the theory that explains the structures that help identify the story and the discourse of a text and helps us analyze and understand narratives.

The structuralist study of literature, associated with the names of Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Genette, and others, sought not to interpret literature but to investigate its structures and devices. (CULLER, pg. 8).

In order to identify these basic elements and techniques of a narrative we need specific terms that can order our knowledge of the text – this is what the study of narratology brought us.

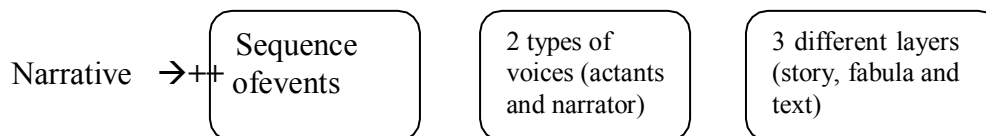
I will base my discussion on Mieke Bal's (2009) *Narratology*, because I believe her point of view on the subject, particularly her discussions about *focalization* – which will be further explained – are of more use for the purpose of my analysis. In addition, Herman & Vervaeck's (2005) *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, which contain definitions from several authors and focus more on the perspective of the reader within this theory, will be of help here.

In this chapter, I will briefly present the concepts I will be using during my analysis of Capote's novel from both of the works aforementioned. Although there are some different terminologies when discussing certain aspects of a novel depending on the author, I will focus my analysis on the terms presented here.

2.1 Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*

Mieke Bal (2009) starts by defining a *narrative text* as 'a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee („tells' the reader, real or implied⁴) a story in a particular medium' (loc. 311). A *story* would be the content of that text which produces the manifestation of a *fabula*. A *fabula* 'is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.' (loc. 317), an event being the transition of one state to another and actors being the agents that perform actions – to cause or to experience an event. So, simplifying:

⁴Mieke Bal refers to the reader, but her attention is drawn more to the narrator.



Separating the narrative text in these three different levels implies that each can be analyzed separately, even though they do not exist independently from one another. This separation allows us to be able to explain certain effects a text might cause.

An event always happens in time and always occurs somewhere – whether real existing place or not. Thus, all of these elements – events, actors, time and place - constitute the fabula, and their relation is responsible for the effect that a text can cause. Bal (2009) determines six processes that are involved in the ordering of various elements of a story: the events are organized in a sequence different than the chronological; the time set aside for the elements of the fabula is determined respecting the amount of time these elements take up in the fabula; the actors are individualized and become characters; the location of the events are transformed into specific places; other relationships such as symbolic, allusive and traditional may appear amongst the several elements; the elements are presented through a point of view – *focalization*. Furthermore, Bal (2009) refers to all these elements composing a story as *aspects*.

For a story to be told it needs an agent. Not the writer, or painter, filmmaker or composer, but the agent we formally know as the *narrator*. Nevertheless, inside a text, there are passages concerning more than its events, such as descriptions of a place or a face or an opinion of something. And that is how a text can be classified as narrative, descriptive or argumentative.

Hence, in order to consider our analysis of a narrative, we need to know how all of what is said is narrated and what a narrative text contains. Bal (2009) separates what a narrative text should have in three characteristics: the narrative text should have two types of speakers, one that does not play a role in the fabula and another that does. This exists even when the narrator and the actor are one and the same person (for example, in a narrative in first person); the three layers aforementioned (text, story and fabula); the content it conveys to its readers, the series of events caused or experienced by the actors presented in a specific manner.

2.1.1 The Narrative text and the narrator

‘A narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story’ (loc. 498). Therefore, the first thing we need to know is who exactly this narrative agent is. In the midst of talking about the narrator, the notion of focalization appears, as Bal (2009) says:

Narrator and focalization together determine the narrative situation. The focalizer (...) is an aspect of the story this narrator tells. It is the represented „colouring’ of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, the holder of the „point of view’ (loc 558).

Bal starts by distinguishing the narrator of first and third person as both being *I narrators*, as she explains with the following sentences:

- a) I shall be twenty-one tomorrow.
- b) Elizabeth will be twenty-one tomorrow.

Both sentences are narrated by a speaking subject, an *I*. In the first one, it speaks about itself and in the other about someone else. When the narrator does not refer to itself explicitly as a character, Bal (2009) calls it an external narrator (EN) and this implies the narrator is not an actor inside the fabula. If the *I* is identified with a character (an actor), it is referred to as the character bound narrator (CN).

However, there is more inside a text than the narrative act. A *descriptive* passage, for example, would be a privileged site of focalization – which will be detailed later on – and it also has a high impact on the ideological effect of the text, being indispensable inside a narrative. ‘[descriptive passages] help the imagined world of the fabula become visible and concrete. Logically, fabula elements need to be described so that their functions make sense’ (loc. 920). Bal (2009) defines a description as a ‘textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects’ (loc. 931) and that attribution would be the descriptive function.

Descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula and the way they are inserted characterize the discourse of the narrator. In order for there to be an insertion, you need motivation. According to Bal (2009), this motivation is brought to the text by speaking, looking or acting and becomes then a function of focalization – a character sees something and the description is what that character is seeing.

2.2.2 Focalization

When a story is told, “(...) whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether ‘real’ historical facts are concerned or fictitious events.” (loc. 3020). According to Bal (2009), this nature of story-telling is inevitable. Perception highly depends on the position of the perceiving subject – a child sees things very differently than an adult, for example. Bal (2009) adds:

Perception depends on so many factors that striving for objectivity is pointless. To mention only a few factors: one’s position with respect to the perceived object, the fall of the light, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object; all this and more affects the picture one forms and passes on to others.(loc. 3028)

In a story, elements are presented in a certain manner so as to give us readers a particular vision of the fabula. The term we refer to when discussing the relations between what is presented and the vision through which it is presented is *focalization*.

With the use of this term, Mieke Bal chose to dissociate herself from other current terms inside the theory of narration, such as *point of view* or *narrative perspective*. Bal (2009) affirms that, although proving to be useful, those terms ‘(...) do not make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision.’ (loc. 3040). In summary, it does not make a difference between the one who sees and the one who speaks, therefore, making it harder to describe the technique used in a text in which something is seen and that vision is narrated. For example, in the sentence:

- a. Elizabeth saw him lie there, pale and lost in thought.

It is obviously not spoken by Elizabeth, but it presents her vision clearly. Elizabeth, in Bal’s terms, would be the *focalizer*, or, the object of the focalization:

(...) the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character (i.e., an element of the fabula) or outside it. If it coincides with the character, he will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches

with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. (loc. 3102)

Since focalization refers to a relationship, the subject and the object must be studied separately. The subject – focalizer – is the point from which the elements are viewed, and it lies with a character or outside it: 'If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.' (BAL, loc. 3100)

There can be a *character-bound focalization*, which can shift from a character to another, where we can see the different characters' view of the same facts. This usually results in neutrality towards all the characters. However, generally there is no doubt as to which character should receive more attention or sympathy. Usually, the character that focalizes the first and/or the last chapter of a story would be labeled the hero(ine) of the book. An *internal focalization* would refer to a perspective that lies with only one character who is an actor in the fabula. *External focalization* is that of an anonymous agent, settled outside of the fabula. There can, however, be a switch from an external focalizer to an internal one within the same narrative. In addition, the *focalized object* is important because the way a certain object is presented tells the reader something about the focalizer as well

After stating these differences, Bal (2009) poses three questions about focalization as well:

- 1) What does the character focalize: what is it aimed at?
- 2) How does it do this: with what attitude does it view things?
- 3) Who focalizes it: whose focalized object is it?

The answer to those questions should present us with a certain interpretation of all the elements of the story. The use of focalization also has a strong manipulative effect:

Spoken words are audible to others and are thus perceptible when the focalization lies with someone else. Unspoken words – thoughts, internal monologues – no matter how extensive, are not perceptible to other characters. Here, too, lies a possibility for manipulation which is often used. Readers are given elaborate information about the thoughts of a character, which the other characters do not hear. If these thoughts are placed in between the sections of dialogue, readers do not often realize how much less the other character knows than they do. (loc.3254)

In summary, the reader can be manipulated into taking a characters' side, for example. The reader will be able to form an opinion based on the focalization used within the text.

Authors Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck argue in the *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005) – which will be further detailed – that Bal's (2009) revision of the term, refined by the theory of narrative theorist Gérard Genette, was accepted because it helped to clarify the concept, precisely for her remarks on perception.

Bal (2009) continues the discussion on focalization separating it in many different levels. However, for the purpose of this work, I will not comment on these since my analysis will not make use of these elements here.

Luc Herman & Bart Vervaeck's *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*

The *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005) is a compilation of both traditional and recent narrative theories, discussing theorists such as Gérard Genette, Wayne Booth, Seymour Chatman and Mieke Bal in order to form a very comprehensive account on narratology. Their text is very oriented towards the reader's experience, a perspective that is of extreme importance for my analysis.

The Handbook begins with a discussion on the importance of narratology for text interpretation and the need to analyze both *content* (the narrated world) and *form* (the way this world is represented):

If narratology becomes a mere formalistic game in which the distinction of various narrators does not go hand-in-hand with a discussion of what they actually tell us, then the contents of a narrative remain mistakenly untouched. Conversely, it would be wrong to forget the narrative aspects of a story and to focus exclusively on content. Whoever insists on doing the latter not only misses out on various thematic and interpretive layers but also reduces a text to its content or message. In fact it is the way in which a story is narrated that turns it into what it is. (pg. 7)

The interpretation we as readers carry out is the effort to connect the content with its form, though that connection isn't evident – it is up to the reader to figure it out. This discovery may imply on awareness of an ideology, or a set of world views, which always has to do with context. Herman & Vervaeck's belief is that the most important new components of contemporary narrative theory remain with the reader and the context. An analysis of a story depends on the reader who brings that story to life within his own context, and realizes the context of the story in various levels, whether ideological or literary.

Author and Narrator

It has become customary to say that the author of a book must never be confused with its narrator. This becomes problematic, for instance, with autobiographical fiction, where author and narrator are closely connected. Author Wayne Booth makes an analysis related to this in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), where he says that ‘a narrative text is a form of communication, and therefore you always have a sender, a message, and a receiver.’ (HERMAN & VERVAECK, p. 16). These concepts are not simply translated into author, narrative and reader, but include more agents involved in between author and narrative. Thus, Booth inserts three: the *implied author*, the *dramatized author* and the *narrator* (dramatized or undramatized). I would like to refer to the notion of implied author.

The *implied author* does not appear in the text, but is part of the narrative: ‘(...) he is responsible for the world-view emanating from a narrative’ (HERMAN & VERVAECK, p. 17) and this view is settled on the basis of word choice, humor and the way the characters are introduced. The implied author and the narrator’s reliability are a construction made by the reader, for it is up to his own preconceived ideas about reliability and trustworthiness:

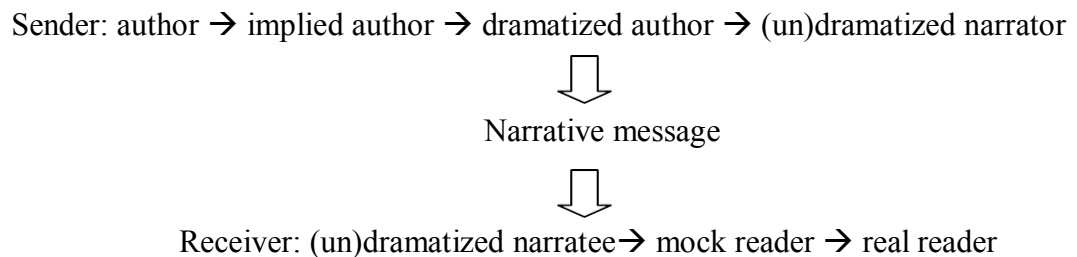
In theory he occupies a position on the side of the sender since he connects to the author, but in practice he amounts to a construction by the receiver (the reader), who makes use of the message (the text) in order to arrive at this construction. (pg. 17)

According to Herman & Vervaeck (2005), one of the main theorists of narratology, Gérard Genette, has made a very strict separation between the author outside the text (the empirical author) and the narrator, therefore he is heavily opposed to the concept of implied author. The reason for this rejection is mainly due to the more formalist view Genette holds in regards to a narrative. Though evidently the reader is part of the equation in reading, formalists (or classical narratologists) such as Genette are more concerned with the structure of narrative per se than with its connection with readership. Herman & Vervaeck (2005) accept the implied author as an intermediate position, and, more importantly, as a construction that results from the interaction between the text and the reader. Thus, this is why I chose to rely on their work to analyze Capote’s novel.

Narrator and reader

According to Booth, every text envisions a type of reader with a certain ideology and attitude, which, functioning as a parallel correspondent to the implied author is similar to his second self. Booth calls this reader a *mock reader*⁵, and just like the implied author, he cannot be heard or seen in the text. He stands in an intermediate position because he is neither the individual that is reading the text nor the one explicitly addressed by the narrator. In narratology this agent is usually referred to as *narratee*.

The narratee can be either dramatized or undramatized, just like the narrator. All texts have a narratee, even if he remains invisible, since all stories are addressed to someone (whether consciously or not). Herman & Vervaeck (2005) schematized the communicative situation of narrative as such:



Narratology is much more complex and has a much broader scope than what can be seen in the short explanations I have included here. With my analysis, I expect to analyze how the narrator makes use of focalization to reveal the main character's feelings and expectations and find how this affects the reader and why. Even though the novel I chose does not emphasize many of the elements that are described in the theory, I found that through the study of narratology I was able to become more attentive and perceptive of the text and was able to come to a different understanding than what I had before.

In the next chapter, I intend to show these elements on text and perhaps by this simple structural analysis, bring the novel to a close and more detailed discussion of the elements that bring this story together and unravel a little bit of what is behind that story.

⁵ Term coined by Walker Gibson in 1950.

3 THE NOVEL

Truman Capote said,

'Other Voices, Other Rooms' was an attempt to exorcise demons, an unconscious, altogether intuitive attempt, for I was not aware, except for a few incidents and descriptions, of its being in any serious degree autobiographical. Rereading it now, I find such self-deception unpardonable (CLARKE, p. 150)

Other Voices, Other Rooms is a novel that is characterized both by its peculiar settings and strange characters. The protagonist is thirteen year-old Joel Harrison Knox, who, after his mother dies, moves from his aunt's home in the city of New Orleans to an isolated plantation house to meet his estranged father. As the book begins, he makes his way to Noon City, a town nearest to Skully's Landing – the house where his father lives.

Like many of Capote's protagonists, Joel is an orphan. Perhaps to mirror his own unhappy childhood, Capote often portrays characters who lack nurturing and who find maternal influences outside the scope of his biological parents. Furthermore, Joel's delicate appearance evokes Truman's own looks, for which he was teased throughout his childhood. In the following excerpt, one has a description of Joel through the focalization of Sam Radclif, who meets Joel at the Morning Star Café where he is staying and ends up giving him a ride close to the Landing. This character's depiction of Joel is not positive and gives the reader a certain initial distance from Joel, though we as readers will be brought gradually closer to him as the narrative develops:

Radclif eyed the boy over the rim of his beer glass, not caring much for the looks of him. He had his notions of what a 'real' boy should look like, and this kid somehow offended them. He was too pretty, too delicate and fair-skinned; each of his features was shaped with a sensitive accuracy, and a girlish tenderness softened his eyes, which were brown and very large. His brown hair, cut short, was streaked with pure yellow strands. A kind of tired, imploring expression masked his thin face, and there was an un-youthful sag about his shoulders (CAPOTE, pg.8)

Terms such as 'eyed the boy', 'not caring much for the looks of him' and 'the kid ... offended him' are clear depictions of the attitude of distance and suspicion Joel is seen with. It is also an interesting strategy on the part of Capote, for as a first view of Joel, we, as readers, are not drawn to the boy, nor are we sympathetic right at the start. It will only be

throughout the development of the narrative that certain traits and events will provide a different understanding of Joel as a character.

Nevertheless, there are other aspects about Joel that do not initially invite us to like him. We find that even though Joel is well treated in his aunt's house, he dislikes his relatives and is often cruel, mainly to his cousin Louise. Just as his relatives, though, he cannot understand his own behavior, as we can see from Joel's own perspective:

He would not joke or join in the rousing after-supper games his uncle inaugurated nightly, and he took odd pleasure in bringing to attention a slip of grammar on anyone's part, but why this was true puzzled him as much as the Kendalls. It was as if he lived those months wearing a pair of spectacles with green, cracked lenses, and had wax-plugging in his ears, for everything seemed to be something it wasn't, and the days melted in a constant dream. (pg.12-13)

Joel's focalization is brought to our awareness especially in the image of the spectacles with cracked lenses and the wax in his ears, as Joel is said to find everything 'to be something it wasn't', while the feeling of being in a constant dream will be evoked again at other moments in the narrative. The spectacles and wax are evidently brought up to indicate the trouble Joel has in understanding not only his own actions, but also in seeing those around him as humans. The dream-like quality of his days is a necessary item in order to display Joel's lack of clear thinking, something he will have to overcome on his way to maturity.

When Joel's father's letter arrives inviting him to go live with him at Skully's Landing, Joel is filled with anticipation of meeting this man who had been the subject of his fantasies for so many years. He couldn't tell why (as is evident in most of the attitudes the boy displays at this point), but he felt glad about going, as if he expected somehow the god-like action of someone – an entity, a savior - whisking him away.

Most of the narrative is filtered through Joel's perception and most of the action that gives the novel the plot's resolution is seen through his perspective. Although we do have a glimpse of the other characters' personalities, the combination of external focalization by this narrator and the shift to Joel's own perspective – through the narrator's voice – gives us more moments to learn about Joel, and, thus, the reader knows how he feels and thinks as, for example, when he arrives at Noon City before going to Skully's Landing:

(...) as he lay in a scaling iron bed above the Morning Star Café, dizzy with heat and loss and despair, a different picture of his father and of his situation asserted itself: he did not know what to expect, and he was afraid, for already there were so many

disappointments. A panama hat, newly bought in New Orleans and worn with dashing pride, had been stolen in the train depot in Biloxi; then the Paradise Chapel bus had run three hot, sweaty hours behind schedule; and finally, topping everything, there had been no word from Skully's Landing waiting at the café. All Thursday night he'd left the electric light burning in the strange room, and read a movie magazine till he knew the latest doings of the Hollywood stars by heart, for if he let his attention turn inward even a second he would begin to tremble, and the mean tears would not stay back. (pg. 14)

The feeling of loneliness and gradual disappointment on Joel's part is clearly visible in this part and leads the reader to gradually feeling empathy in relation to this child-character. His dizziness is related to the heat, but also to 'loss and despair.' The last lines, in which we realize how terrified Joel really is, despite the uplifting beginning (the new panama hat he wears 'with dashing pride', but which 'had been stolen') are heartbreaking – the magazine and Hollywood lives are a foil against his fear that no one is there for him. Besides this, leaving the light on all night reveals a truly frightened and insecure boy, one who, as the excerpt says, has experienced 'so many disappointments'.

Thus, this third person narrator (*external* according to Bal, *extradiegetic* according to Herman & Vervaeck, 2005) has more insight than a mere observer. Though he hovers above the story and is dealing with things he apparently did not experience, the focalization gives away an evident closeness with suffering and fear from the perspective of a child that is touching. This focalization is mostly derived from Joel: it is his experience at the time of the events that we can observe. However, since the narrator is not a character, nor is he a witness or somewhat part of the narrative world, as readers we realize through the linguistic choices and other structural indications (narrative choices having to do with the presentation of events, for example) that it is, after all, an adult narrator – closely connected to the character, Joel - who is manipulating how we see the story. How this adult presents impressions and events allows the reader to be pulled into Joel's world. Hence, this type of narrator can become inconspicuous if narrating exclusively as an external device. Nevertheless, the peculiarity of the narrator found in Capote's novel is that, although he has these characteristics, he is also a narrator that gives us insight into the child's mind as if, at one point, he had experienced it all. It seems certain that, by building a narrator that is so close to the child's mind and experiences, Capote is trying to provoke an effect on his mock reader, one that will approximate this reader to Joel and his world of experiences.

In addition, and as an effect the novel creates through the mind of this child, we find the narrative is permeated by ghostly and dark descriptions of places, as well as being

populated with very eccentric characters, which is typical of what has been termed *Southern Gothic* in fiction. Southern Gothic is a subgenre of Gothic literature within American literature that takes place specifically in the south of the US. The focus of this genre is usually freakish aberrations and grotesque figures, though it may include supernatural elements:

(...) it appropriates elements of the traditional Gothic, combines them with the particular concerns of the American South, and is characterized by an emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre and, very often, the violent, investigating madness, decay and despair, and the continuing pressures of the past upon the present(PUNTER and BYRON, 2004: 116-117)

In *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Capote's narrator utilizes this sense of the strange merged with sentiment to transmit the loneliness of Joel's character. The descriptions reinforce his isolation, such as in the following passage, where Joel is arriving at Noon City all alone: 'Also, this lonesome country; and here in the swamplike hollows where tiger lilies bloom the size of a man's head, there are luminous green logs that shine under the dark marsh water like drowned corpses' (CAPOTE, pg. 7). The description is sort of horrific for a child's imagination, and passages like this one are a pattern in the book. Everything Joel sees is either spookish or ghastly (when it is not brought on by a sense of loneliness and despair), which is very representative of what it is like for a child to be in a new and unknown place.

Thus, many of the descriptive passages are replete with grotesque and mystical tones, where the physical and the psychological merge to weave the story. All the impressionistic descriptions define the nature of the place and Joel's emotions as he observes everything around him:

He had reached the garden by following a path which led round from the front of the house through the rampart of interlacing trees. And here, in the overgrown confusion, were some plants taller than his head, and others razor-sharp with thorns; brittle sun-curved leaves crackled under his cautious step. The dry, tangled weeds grew waist high. The sultry smells of summer and sweet shrub and dark earth were heavy, and the itchy whirr of bumblebees stung the silence. He could hardly raise his eyes upward, for the sky was pure blue fire. The wall of the house rising above the garden was like a great yellow cliff, and patches of Virginia creeper greenly framed all its eight overlooking windows. (pg. 52)

His surroundings almost always look a bit monstrous and the atmosphere is mostly gloomy. Plants that are 'taller than his head', or 'razor-sharp with thorns' arouse the same sensations in us, as readers, as Joel is feeling. Whether beneath his feet ('brittle sun-curved leaves'), or by his side ('dry, tangled weeds' that 'grew waist high'), nature is not a welcoming element. There are smells and sounds expressed in the excerpt above that are made all the more sinister

in the silence around him. The sky itself is described as ‘blue fire’, while the house is seen as a cliff.

Even though Joel eventually will no longer miss his life in New Orleans, in the beginning the images are painted in a very interesting way: his surroundings at the Landing are always obscure and strange, whereas when remembering New Orleans, they are always reminiscent of light colors, all actually inspired by the story Ellen would read to him called ‘The Snow Queen’ or, when he lies to Zoo about seeing snow:

Sometimes, on flat boring afternoons, he’d squatted on the curb of St. Deval Street and daydreamed silent pearly snow clouds into sifting coldly through the boughs of the dry, dirty trees. Snow falling in August and silvering the glassy pavement, the ghostly flakes icing his hair, coating rooftops, changing the grimy old neighborhood into a hushed frozen white wasteland uninhabited except for himself and a menagerie of wonder-beasts: albino antelopes, and ivory-breasted snowbirds; (pg. 47)

Though the neighborhood in New Orleans is described as being ‘grimy’, and the time spent is ‘flat’ and ‘boring’, Joel’s memory of having an escape by imagining, ‘wonder-beasts’ such as the ones described is brought up as a contrast to his impressions of the Landing. Furthermore, the narrator has given the reader insight into the boy’s daydreams of a better place, his thoughts and creations of strange but beautiful beasts. In the same way that Joel would be able to see these creatures in the setting of New Orleans, would he be influenced by his new surroundings at his father’s house. Thus, the depictions of gloomy, frightening and strange events and places are clearly given as Joel’s mind at work.

By creating a character at the beginning of puberty such as Joel, it is as if the narrator were enticing the reader to invest a level of emotional energy in understanding the reality or fantasy of the story whilst reading the novel. The sadness and despair of Joel’s childhood experiences reflect Capote’s own – these can be observed clearly once we have information from his biography –, giving the reader insight into the culture of the deep south with all its traditions of superstitions. These appear to have been as powerful in shaping Joel’s character as they were in shaping Capote as an author, since they become the core elements of his fictional world and are worked into his writing skills.

A decaying mansion in the state of Mississippi, Skully’s Landing does not have electricity or running water. Its five white columns in the garden, are the only reminders of a burned-down side porch, which Joel sees as an unusual sight: ‘(...) like a set of fingers, a row of five white fluted columns lent the garden the primitive, haunted look of a lost ruin’ (CAPOTE, pg. 40). All the details and the pattern of the language give the novel an

atmosphere of a dream, or nightmare, one in which Joel feels lost. The finger-like aspect of the columns seem to evoke a giant hand, one that might readily capture Joel and destroy him, as if it were a monster, a primitive creature waiting to attack. In addition, the decay and dejection of the plantation's surroundings (certainly at one time a prosperous and thriving estate) denote a state of depression which is tune with Joel's nightmarish experience.

As I have mentioned before in my introduction, Truman's narrator and implied author are very close to each other. The symbols, the words, the tone of the text, all connect to the way the author felt towards this period in his life. The novel feels like a combination of suppressed emotions that form an allegory of how Truman Capote may have felt during his childhood. The closeness of the story – and the way it is narrated – to the author's known experiences as a child is made evident in the very images that are used to describe Joel's feelings and the events as they are seen by him.

In addition, all the characters who live both in and out of the Landing are somewhat peculiar and even grotesque. There is Joel's father's new wife Miss Amy, brownish hair, fragile-boned and with a glove in one single hand which she carried as if it were crippled; her effeminate cousin Randolph, described as having a face smooth and hairless, cheeks colored in pink, a nose with a broken look, sky-blue womanly eyes and curly blonde hair; Ed Samson, Joel's father, who remains mysteriously out of sight for the majority of the novel; The neighboring twin girls, feminine and prissy Florabel and the wild tomboy 'with fiery dutchboy hair' (pg. 19) Idabel⁶; Little Sunshine, who is an old black hermit '(...) and ugly. He had a blue cataract in one eye, hardly a tooth in his head, and smelled bad' (pg. 75) who lives in the Cloud Hotel in Noon City; Jesus Fever, 'a kind of gnomish little Negro whose primitive face was sharp against the drowning green sky' (pg. 25) and his granddaughter Missouri ('Zoo'), whose appearance Joel thinks is very curious:

Missouri Fever was like a supple black cat as she paraded serenely about the kitchen, the casual flow of her walk beautifully sensuous and haughty. She was slant-eyed, and darker than the charred stove; her crooked hair stood straight on end, as if she'd seen a ghost, and her lips were thick and purple. The length of her neck was something to ponder upon, for she was almost a freak, a human giraffe, and Joel recalled photos, which he'd scissored once from the pages of a *National Geographic*, of curious African ladies with countless silver chokers stretching their necks to improbable heights. (pgs. 44-45).

⁶ The character of Idabel is loosely based on Capote's childhood friend Harper Lee, who was also a bit of a tomboy and teased Truman for his preppy looks.

Joel thus sees Zoo as both animal and human (a cat, a human giraffe, an African lady with chokers), fascinating to him as if she were an alien creature, beautiful and sensuous, a bit menacing with her dark, slant-eyed face, thick, purple lips and stiff hair. She is envisioned in a similar fashion to what he daydreamed about in New Orleans, where wonderful beasts roamed the streets of the city.

The day after his arrival, Joel learns (after being continuously ignored) that his father is very ill and he has to wait to meet him. He develops a relationship with Zoo, who cares for him and talks about God, to which Joel reacts by thinking (without saying) that he didn't like God that much for He had betrayed him many times:

But there was no prayer in Joel's mind; rather, nothing a net of words could capture, for, with one exception, all his prayers of the past had been simple concrete requests: God, give me a bicycle, a knife with seven blades, a box of oil paints. Only how, how, could you say something so indefinite, so meaningless as this: God, let me be loved.' (p. 59)

Thus, as a child, Joel had asked for objects he desired from God (who in this case is almost a Santa Claus), knowing that the chances of getting any of these were slim. He feels betrayed, however, when he realizes that the one thing an entity such as God could give him is the thing that is farthest from his reality, and hardest to express – to be loved, for Joel, is the only thing that matters, and the only thing he feels afraid he will never get.

Joel's unease about his life and the new experience he is facing is depicted in situations such as Randolph's approximation to him and his attempt to write to his aunt Ellen to tell her he wants to go back. In the last case, he realizes he has no stamps, but '(...) he figured it would be legal simply to put six cents cash money in the r.f.d box. So he wadded a nickel and a penny in toilet tissue, gathered his letters and started downstairs' (pg. 74). The situation of the mailbox exposes very well Joel's childish mindset. To place the letter and the money there expecting it will somehow, magically, be delivered, clearly denotes a lack of experience and connection with reality. The narrator's exposition of this experience reveals this to the reader – who may feel pity and sympathy for Joel – also as an expectation as to how the narrative will fulfill the event. As adult readers, we are certainly expecting the unfolding of this situation in the future of the story (which will be that the letters, evidently, do not get sent). The way this event is narrated also reveals more: at times the narrator seems to want the reader to be fully aware of Joel as a child so that, on the one hand, this reader will realize his unrealistic expectations (thus, distancing himself or herself as an adult would),

while, on the other hand, he is drawn closer to understanding and, perhaps, empathizing with Joel.

As for Joel's relationship with Randolph, at first he is puzzled by the appearance of this man, the way he dresses and his way of speaking. But Joel is flattered by his attention and as he gets to know Randolph, he understands him and begins to grow fond of him. Gerald Clarke makes an interesting remark precisely about the importance of Randolph's character:

(...) Randolph becomes the spokesman for the novel's major themes - and the themes that dominate all of Truman's writing: the loneliness that afflicts all but the stupid or insensitive; the sacredness of love, whatever its form; the disappointment that invariably follows high expectation; and the perversion of innocence. (p. 59)

We are able to see these feelings in instances where Randolph talks about his past and about being in love:

It was different, this love of mine for Pepe, more intense than anything I felt for Dolores, and lonelier. But we are alone, darling child, terribly, isolated each from other; so fierce is the world's ridicule we cannot speak or show our tenderness; for us, death is stronger than life, it pulls like a wind through the dark, all our cries burlesqued in joyless laughter; and with the garbage of loneliness stuffed down us until our guts burst bleeding green, we go screaming round the world, dying in our rented rooms, nightmare hotels, eternal homes of the transient heart. (p. 113-114)

Randolph's voice comes from his experience and is a counterpoint to Joel's as he exposes to the young boy the deception that is love, and the disappointment that results from the expectation that we will be loved forever. What Randolph gives voice to here also reflects the loneliness of adulthood, a despair that is described effectively in how 'we go screaming round the world, dying in our rented rooms, nightmare hotels, eternal homes of the transient heart.' The stability and affection that Joel seeks is a mirage in Randolph's perspective and this adult voice reflects, in a way, perhaps, the adult narrator. Though this narrator is external to events in the novel, the use of Randolph as 'spokesman' for the issue of lack of love and loneliness seems to contrast with young Joel's hope, still alive, still very present in his life.

Joel is eventually allowed to see his father. He finds not the man that he built in his fantasies, but an almost speechless paralytic who demands help by tossing red tennis balls from his bed onto the floor. Joel reads to him and feeds him, but does not develop any affection for him. At this point of the story, we already know that Joel is living inside a

fantasy of a paternal approval, that he feels he is being judged for being inadequate and how afraid he is of being rejected, as we can see at the beginning of the novel:

And then, sitting alone in the quiet kitchen, he was taken with a terrible idea: what if his father had seen him already? Indeed, had been spying on him ever since he arrived, was, in fact, watching him at this very moment? An old house like this would most likely be riddled with hidden passages, and picture-eyes that were not eyes at all, but peepholes. And his father thought: that runt is an impostor; my son would be taller and stronger and handsomer and smarter-looking. (pg. 42)

Once more, through the mind of the child, this father is at the same time a distant adult who wants little to do with him, and an all-seeing presence. Thus, he imagines the old house as having ‘picture-eyes’ that were really peepholes, reinforcing his unease with his surroundings. He actually transfers his own feelings of inadequacy to his father, giving him a voice that calls him a ‘runt’, an ‘imposter’ that should be more perfect than anyone else. The narrator’s closeness to this character is seen in this expression of a child’s fear that he will never live up to an adult’s expectation. There seems to be a feeling of empathy on the part of the narrator who can so fully describe this in the images chosen. Of course, as part of his learning process, eventually, Joel realizes that his father cannot provide him the nurturing and protection he seeks, which serves merely to reinforce how alone Joel feels.

Gradually, Joel builds connections with those around him, in an attempt to comprehend the environment in which he is placed. Later on, as Joel is reading to his father, he thinks about how he feels towards him, expressing, in his turn, how inadequate he sees this man is as a father, in his immature perspective. He is filled with guilt for not feeling more for this man, though, at the same time, in his immaturity, he wishes he could go back in time and continue to fantasize about Mr. Samsom and his ideal father:

Every once in a while he was tantalized by a sense of guilt: he ought to feel more for Mr. Samsom than he did, he ought to try and love him. If only he’s never seen Mr. Samson! Then he could have gone on picturing him as looking this and that wonderful way, as talking in a kind strong voice, as being really his father. (p. 130)

While Joel reads, Ed keeps repeating ‘boy kind kind boy kind’. But once Joel hears a whistle and goes to the window to see Idabel calling for him, he leaves, and Samsom says ‘bad boy bad boy bad bad!’ letting go of all the red balls in the bed. The presence of the balls as a form of communication between Ed and the world around him is both simple (a toy that any small child could use) and emphatic. The color denotes aggressiveness and anger, as well

as a warning to Joel of the kind of man his father is (and how he would possibly act if only he were able to).

Idabel comes up with the idea of both running away together and, when Joel remembers he had never met Little Sunshine to get his charm; he thinks this might be a good idea. On the way to the Cloud Hotel, they have to cross a river on a rotting beam. Wanting to show her he was as tough as a boy should be, he pushes Idabel aside to go first. However, Joel freezes once he sees a cottonmouth and he's paralyzed with fear. Idabel then reaches for the sword Joel has and thrusts it at the snake which is carried away by the current. Joel then realizes he doesn't need to cross the river because he doesn't need the charm anymore, for that must've been all the danger that would ever await him. The adventure evokes a typical fantasy of most children and is described very well. It brings together the desire to escape from the 'adults who never understand' and the opportunity to prove oneself as independent and brave. It can also be seen as a paradox – Joel's desire to show he can be a brave boy, though the purpose is to obtain a charm to protect him (a superstition, useless and illogical), and the logic of a child who, after having actually proved he is anything but brave, decides that the charm is no longer needed since there could be nothing more dangerous than coming face to face with a snake⁷.

Back home, he goes up to Mr. Samson's room to say his goodbyes and runs away with Idabel again. They both make it to Noon City where there's a fair in town. The children go into a tent where they see very peculiar things and meet Miss Wisteria, a midget girl:

At the ten-cent tent they saw a four-legged chicken (stuffed), and the two-headed baby floating in a glass tank like a green octopus: Idabel studied it a long while, and when she turned away her eyes were moist: 'Poor little baby,' she said, 'poor little thing.' The Duck Boy cheered her up; he sure was a comedy all right, quack-quack-quacking, making dopey faces and flapping his hands, the fingers of which were webbed together; at one point he opened his shirt to reveal a white feathery chest. Joel preferred Miss Wisteria, a darling little girl, he thought, and so did Idabel; they did not quite believe she was a midget, though Miss Wisteria herself claimed to be twenty-five years old (...), her own sweet little gold head sported a twinkling crown; she wore elegant silver slippers (it was a marvel the way she could walk on her toes); her dress was a drape of purple silk tied about the middle with a yellow silk sash. She hopped and skipped and giggled and sang a song and said a poem, and when she came off the platform, Idabel, more excited than Joel had ever seen her, rushed up and asked, please, wouldn't she have some sodapop with them. 'Charmed,' said Miss Wisteria, twisting her gold sausage curls, 'charmed.' Idabel humbled herself(p. 145-146)

⁷ These events almost directly co-relate to Truman's returning to the south to write and being bitten by a cottonmouth.

The comicalness of Duck Boy, the empathy towards the two-headed baby and the appeal of Miss Wisteria are dominant here, all deriving from infantile visions of the marvelous life of the circus. Miss Wisteria's performance and appearance are especially detailed, with emphasis to her child-like actions (hopping, skipping, giggling, singing) which immediately attract the children, especially Idabel.

The three of them get along well and decide to go together on the Ferris wheel. Joel thinks Idabel is acting quite strange, and so he realizes that she is falling in love with Miss Wisteria:

Draining her coke, [Miss Wisteria] she took out a lipstick and reshaped her kewpie-bow; then a queer thing happened: Idabel, borrowing the lipstick, painted an awkward clownish line across her mouth, and Miss Wisteria, clapping her little hands, shrieked with a kind of sassy pleasure. Idabel met this merriment with a dumb adoring smile. Joel could not understand what had taken her. Unless it was that the midget had cast a spell. But as she continued to fawn over tiny yellow-haired Miss Wisteria it came to him that Idabel was in love. (pg. 147)

The scene is emblematic of fantasies of running away with the circus, or of being involved with the creatures who are part of the shows the circus presents. The two-headed baby, Duck Boy and the midgets are all outcasts placed in a scenario where they are the center of attentions, something that Joel and Idabel find fascinating, given their feelings of being unloved by their families. Miss Wisteria is taken to be the children's equal, though she is an adult of twenty-five and probably well aware of her power of seduction, as can be seen in how she reapplies her lipstick. Right before Joel's eyes, Idabel falls in love with her, as a result of a spell, in his way of thinking. The attempt on Idabel's part to color her lips is seen as being strange and a bit grotesque – she looks clownish – a focalization of Joel's which is in keeping with how adult readers see the scene. Nevertheless, Idabel's infatuation is interpreted by Joel as being nothing more than love, an emotion that we can understand and empathize with, since we have thus far been made aware of Joel's (and Idabel's) need for this emotion.

It suddenly starts to rain and everybody runs for shelter. Inside a tent, while he is listening to Miss Wisteria talk about her life, Joel sees a flash of Randolph and tries to escape. Because he can't seem to find Idabel anywhere, he ends up on the porch of an old house and hides inside. Miss Wisteria follows him, calling for him saying 'little boy'. He doesn't reveal himself for he starts to feel sorry for not being able to give her what she is looking for, as expressed in the excerpt below. He compares the life he has with her life, who suffered because little boys always grew older and taller and would leave her behind:

„Little boy’, she said, swerving her flashlight over the bent, broken walls where her midget image mingled with the shadows of things in flight. „Little boy’, she said, the resignation of her voice intensifying its pathos. But he dared not show himself, for what she wanted he could not give: his love was in the earth, shattered and still, dried flowers where eyes should be, and moss upon the lips, his love was faraway feeding on the rain, lilies frothing from its ruin. Withdrawing, she went up the stairs, and Joel, who listened to her footfalls overhead as she in her need of him searched the jungle of rooms, felt for himself ferocious contempt: what was his terror compared with Miss Wisteria’s? He owned a room, he had a bed, any minute now he would run from here, go to them. But for Miss Wisteria, weeping because little boys must grow tall, there would always be this journey through dying rooms until some lonely day she found her hidden one, the smiler with the knife. (pg. 152)

The images depicted through Joel’s perspective evoke sadness and mortality: the earth, dried flowers, moss and ruin are curiously associated to love. He is terrified by the feelings love brings – at the same time, hope and degeneration, the start and end of life – and blames himself for not being able to help Miss Wisteria in her own feeling of loneliness. It is both eerie and touching that the midget would look for love – whatever the form of this might mean to her – in boys who are her size but who end up growing up, a quest that Joel, in empathy, sees as even more hopeless than his own. His vision of having a room to go to is perhaps his initial step towards a sense of belonging, not in the way he had imagined, but certainly in a positive sense. What Joel sees in Miss Wisteria’s future is only death, expressed by the room with ‘the smiler with the knife’.

A recurrent feeling that the novel has is that the search of love somewhat defines all characters. Randolph, at a certain point, tells Joel about a prizefighter he was in love with, Pepe Alvarez, and how he was left behind when he ran away with another woman. Amy seems to have found love in taking care of Ed, whom, in the past, Randolph accidentally shot, after which Amy took upon herself to take care of and marry. Zoo, in her turn, had been married to a man, Keg Brown, who tried to kill her. And, there is Miss Wisteria, always looking for someone of her own size to love, but who is the love Idabel seems to be looking for – a person as strange as she felt herself to be, somehow deserving of one another.

In the beginning of the last chapter, Joel seems to be having a fever and dreaming; he wakes up to the sound of a rocking chair, on which sits Randolph, who is looking after him. Joel has been sick with pneumonia for a long time, a time that is not covered in the narrative, therefore configuring itself as an ellipse. Joel wakes with a feeling of guilt for having run away and worries that Randolph might be mad at him. He stays in bed for a long time, and the narrator shows us how Joel notices that he is growing up:

He drifted deep into September; the blissful depths of the bed seemed future enough, every pore absorbed its cool protection. And when he thought of himself he affixed the thought to a second person, another Joel Knox about whom he was interested in the moderate way one would be in a childhood snapshot: what a dumbbell! he would gladly be rid of him, this old Joel, but not quite yet, he somehow needed him still. For long periods each day he studied his face in a hand mirror: a disappointing exercise, on the whole, for nothing he saw concretely affirmed his suspicions of emerging manhood, though about his face there were certain changes: baby-fat had given way to a true shape, the softness of his eyes had hardened: it was a face with a look of innocence but none of its charm, an alarming face, really, too shrewd for a child, too beautiful for a boy. It would be difficult to say how old he was. All that displeased him was the brown straightness of his hair. He wished it were curly gold like Randolph's. (pg. 156)

Joel's feeling of bliss goes no further than the bed he is lying in, but, at the same time, he sees another Joel, one who is older and harder, one who, perhaps, is more ready to deal with the disappointments and realities of life. Paradoxically, this Joel has no charm and seems to be caught in some limbo ('too shrewd for a child, too beautiful for a boy'), an adult-child whose hair is not curly, an indication still of Joel's infantile wishes. The vision of this other Joel comes to him from a distance, and it is this possibility of stepping back and gradually defining himself that will lead Joel to maturity.

Nevertheless, at this point, Joel tells Randolph he feels very happy, for he finds there is some sort of balance within him, suddenly:

There was so little to cope with. The mist which for him overhung so much of Randolph's conversation, even that had lifted, at least it was no longer troubling, for it seemed as though he understood him absolutely. Now in the process of, as it were, discovering someone, most people experience simultaneously an illusion they are discovering themselves: the other's eyes reflect their real and glorious value. Such a feeling was with Joel, and inestimably so because this was the first time he'd ever known the triumph, false or true, of seeing through to a friend. And he did not want any more to be responsible, he wanted to put himself in the hands of his friend, be, as here in the sickbed, dependent upon him for his very life. (pg. 157)

The narrator's perspective becomes more evident here as he indicates what 'most people' experience and right away tells us this is comparable to Joel's feelings. The clue here that Joel is still in a stage between boyhood and adulthood is revealed in his desire to throw responsibility onto Randolph, though he is – as if he were an adult – aware of his affection for the older man.

As Joel begins to realize that he has fallen in love with Randolph, he sometimes gets close to speaking out about his love for him. At the same time, he realizes he's very confused by Randolph's identity, expressed as genderless, invisible:

And even if he spoke to Randolph, to whom would he be confessing love? Faceted as a fly's eye, being neither man nor woman, and one whose every identity cancelled the other, a grab-bag of disguises, who, what was Randolph? X, an outline in which with crayon you color in the character, the ideal hero: whatever his role, it is pitched by you into existence. Indeed, try to conceive of him alone, unseen, unheard, and he becomes invisible, he is not to be imagined. But such as Randolph justify fantasy, and if a genii should appear, certainly Joel would have asked that these sealed days continue through a century of calendars. (p. 159)

The voice of the narrator becomes more evident here, and a certain distance from the child Joel is made clear. This can be seen by the complexity of the description given of Randolph and by the fact that this description can be made at all. Who but an adult voice could come up with such a vision of a man as that of 'neither man nor woman', who conceived as 'alone, unseen, unheard' is invisible, unimagined? The indication of Joel's in-betweenness – child and man at the same time – comes in the last lines of wishing these days under Randolph's care never end. Still, this is phrased in such a way that indicates how removed Joel is from this fantasy, with the use of 'if a genii should appear ... Joel would have asked...', and how the narrator has placed himself apart in a way.

These days are eventually brought to an end by Randolph who says they are going to Cloud Hotel because Little Sunshine wants to see them. Joel feels Randolph is lying about his reasons to go there and pleads for them to stay, but his plea is rejected. They both take the mule up to Cloud Hotel – the same one that brought Joel to the Landing – but it turns out Little Sunshine was very surprised with their appearance, thus indicating that Randolph had actually lied to Joel. They follow Little Sunshine inside, but, before that, attach a spittoon to the mule's – who is called John Brown – leg, so they can hear him in case he wandered off; they then leave him in the lobby. Little Sunshine serves whisky to Randolph and himself and Joel lets his minds wander. Lying on the floor and staring at a fire lit in the room, Joel sees a face erupt from the flames:

(...) a veined, vacillating shape, its features formed slowly, and even when complete stayed veiled in dazzle; his eyes burned tar-hot as he brought them nearer: tell me, tell me, who are you? Are you someone I know? Are you dead? Are you my friend? Do you love me? But the painted, disembodied head remained unborn beyond its mask, and gave no clue. Are you someone I am looking for? He asked, not knowing whom he meant, but certain that for him there must be such a person, just as there was for everybody else: Randolph with his almanac, Miss Wisteria and her search by flashlight, Little Sunshine remembering other voices, other rooms, all of them remembering, or never having known. And Joel drew back. If he recognized the figure in the fire, then what ever would he find to take its place? It was easier not to know, better holding heaven in your hand like a butterfly that is not there at all. (pg. 168)

Here we can see once again a constant impression that arises in Joel's mind, which is the search for someone to love him, though the images that are evoked are not comforting. The mirage burns 'tar-hot', which keeps Joel at a distance, clearly indicating the fear of finding that person which can fill a void in the same way as Randolph's almanac and Little Sunshine's memories of 'other voices, other rooms'. When he thinks to himself 'if he recognized the figure in the fire, then what ever would he find to take its place?', he is acknowledging that even though he longs for someone to love him, he is scared of living without that pursuit, as if life would lose its meaning. If the search for the ephemeral entity were satisfied, if he did indeed find a concrete expression of his love, what would he hold on to?

Suddenly, the group hears a noise coming from downstairs, and Little Sunshine realizes it had to be the mule. Little Sunshine enters the ballroom, with Joel tagging along behind him, and calls for the animal. It becomes terrified and plunges forward, ending up hanging from a beam by the rope-reins twisted about its neck. The morning after, Randolph tells Joel not to wake Little Sunshine up and they leave Cloud Hotel, past the mule hanging in the lobby. On the way, Randolph seems to be in a weird mood and Joel realizes that he is feeling helpless and lost, and he takes it up on himself to find their way home, now without the mule:

He puzzled out the rest of the way back to the Landing the best way he could. Randolph did not say a word. Twice he fell down, and sat there on the ground, solemn and baby-eyed, until Joel helped him up. Another time he walked straight into an old stump: after that, Joel took hold of his coat-tail and steered him. (pg. 171)

Roles seem to have inverted here – Joel is taking care of Randolph and the narrator does not give any clear indication or focalization expressing what the problem with the older man could be. Still, it is clear that Joel is in charge: he must find their way back and keep Randolph on track until they get home. It is Randolph that is 'baby-eyed', seemingly lost in his own thoughts and fears, while Joel is exercising a more adult-like attitude.

Arriving at the Landing, Joel finds out his aunt has been there with his cousin Louise, but he realizes he doesn't care any longer, since she had let him go, not caring to look for him after she had sent him to the Landing, and leaving him to survive on his own among people he did not know at the time he arrived. He realizes the Landing is the place where he was always

meant to be and was now his home, a place where he feels, despite all his insecurities, he belonged.

In the final scene of the novel, Joel walks into the house but pauses at the edge of the garden, thinking he has forgotten something and realizing that he is abandoning his childhood and embracing his youth. The images recall the snow he associated, unrealistically, to New Orleans, though now they represent something else. The references to ‘cold’, ‘shining and silver’ seem to ascertain a harder, tougher Joel who must face his future as a mature individual:

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 rippling 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. (pg. 173)

Joel is now able to focus, see more clearly what before he could not face. Randolph is seen by Joel as the one member of the family who understands him – his eyes are the one moving element at the window. The ‘snow’ gives shape to something new, a form that calls to him, inviting him to enter a new phase of his life.

The fabula is constructed in such a way that, not only do we see the character of Joel grow up, we often empathize with his feelings. Joel goes from being this boy who yearns for love, does not take compliments easily and longs for acceptance and protection, to becoming a young man who finds he is capable of protecting himself as well as others around him

Although Truman Capote did not live in a place as bizarre as the Landing, he did borrow some traits of real-life people for his main characters. As we can see, Joel mirrors Capote very well, down to his description. This is further emphasized by the fact that, when referring to himself, Joel uses his mother’s surname and not his fathers’. One can say that, underneath the surface, lies the story of Capote’s boyhood. Capote’s mother, like Joel’s, rejected him, leaving him to be cared for by his other relatives. He became so used to seeing her leaving, she might as well be dead – just as Joel’s mother. Arch was so absent from his life. He was nothing more than a name to him, just as Samson was to Joel. Joel is as desperate for love as Capote was, to the point that he makes several attempts to become a ‘normal’ straight boy, and, for example, tries to kiss Idabel but is rejected; or wants to kill the snake (though Idabel ends up saving him).

At the end of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* it is as if Joel finally has found peace within himself to accept who he is and what his place is. Perhaps, by revisiting the place where he spent most of his childhood when this story suddenly came to him, Capote was finally able to tell the story of how he managed to demonize – and salvage - his own boyhood.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself.

Truman Capote

It is not uncommon for authors to draw directly from personal experiences when writing. Even though it took Truman Capote years to acknowledge it, his work is permeated with more elements of his personal life than he would wish it to be known. Being almost completely neglected by his parents since very early in his childhood, associated to his experience with southern culture, contributed in shaping not only his personality but also his writing abilities. From a very early age, Capote knew he wanted to be a writer and he pursued this ambition until he perfected it.

Throughout his work, Capote frequently depicted characters that were somewhat isolated, alienated and always in search of love, security and a place where they could belong. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* stands out for many different reasons. It was the first novel he published and it opened the door for Capote to become a major literary figure, aside from all his popularity regarding his lifestyle. With all the glamour that surrounded his life and the persona he created for himself that eventually spoke louder than his work, *Other Voices* became a reference for readers to maybe get a glimpse of his past.

As I stated in the introduction of this thesis, Capote creates a type of narrator that keeps the reader connected to the story. What I intended to find through my personal readings, was the effect that this narrator had on the narrative and the reader. After a close reading of events that occurred during Capote's early childhood, I was able to receive the novel with completely different eyes, observing elements that could remain unseen by a superficial reading. Many reviews from the time of the publishing of the novel, including Prescott's (which I mentioned in my introduction) were not particularly affected by the story behind the eccentric and vivid characters found in the story, even less so by Joel. But by acknowledging the presence of the implied author, I was able to relate so much more of the story to Capote's early life.

By creating a narrator who often focalizes through a child character's perspective, the effect the author seeks seems to be mostly one of empathy. The narrator shows us a child,

described as fragile and delicate, arriving at a completely strange place to live with complete strangers he was supposed to call his family. The narrator's voice is also heard in the narrative. Joel is given focalization, but he is also the object of focalization on the part of the narrator and others, such as Radcliff, at the very beginning when Joel arrives in the town. This switch gives the reader a complete perception of who Joel is, not only to himself but through the eyes of those around him.

The descriptive passages of the novel are often uncanny and manage to build even more tension in this atmosphere in which a child is set in the midst of bizarre surroundings. Capote managed to develop a sensitive story about growing up, about finding one's place despite all adversities, and learning how to cope on your own.

Without the help of studies in the area of narratology it is almost impossible to name this nuanced shifting of focalization and narration. Narrative studies carried out by Genette, Bal, Herman and Vervaeck, among others, have brought to the fore many issues that allow us, as readers, to make observations and absorb concepts related to literary analysis that otherwise would be rendered quite difficult to pinpoint. Our perceptions as readers are not necessarily greater because of theory, but it is true that narratology is able to give support in our analysis, leading us to deeper reflections about our roles as readers and the role of the author, his/her use of certain resources and how this all affects the text we are working with. That Capote was aware of such elements without overtly handling any of this theory underscores the scope of the theory – it is such handling of literary resources that is the focus of narrative studies.

Other Voices, Other Rooms reveals an author who is much more sensible and observing than most readers of Capote generally perceive. The blend of descriptions of the settings, garden plants and a house that has the look of a lost ruin, among other significant elements found in the novel, endorses the idea that Capote seems to be giving the reader a concrete image and example of the decay of the family living at the Landing. Through Joel's relationship with Randolph, the narrator shows all the difficulty of the young boy to come to terms with who he was, just as Capote may have felt when all his mother wanted was for him to be a 'normal boy'.

The plot's resolution comes from knowing that Joel has finally found himself and a place where he can belong. Although Capote did not actually live in such a gloomy, eerie place, it is clear that with *Other Voices* he wanted to convey what most of us usually feel – that growing up is not only truly scary at times - but that there is a way out, one that we ourselves must find and deal with. Capote's narrator is so close to him that it is impossible

not to realize this (and even though Capote himself tried, in the end, not even he could deny this fact).

At the end the personality of a writer has so much to do with the work. The personality has to be humanly there. Personality is a debased word, I know, but it's what I mean. The writer's individual humanity, his word or gesture toward the world, has to appear almost like a character that makes contact with the reader. If the personality is vague or confused or merely literary, *ça ne va pas*.⁸

In other words, though the analysis is carried out with the help of an instrument of such importance as that of narrative studies, though we, as researchers, scrutinize an author's work extensively, the truth is that literature reveals not only the humanity of the author himself – even if we do not express this in an analysis in every detail – but our own. We read literature and study it and write about it because it says so much about our own humanity. It is certainly true that in the case of Truman Capote, personality, as he says, or humanity, is anything but vague.

I hope the analysis I have carried out here has been able to show that Truman Capote was certainly more than just the stories revealed about him and his closeness to celebrities, fame, drugs and the scandalous life he came to lead. The man was also sensible, a perfectionist and a dedicated author who managed to produce, throughout his short life work, the personalities of characters that were built so very close to his own soul in so many different aspects, that they mirrored his own sensibilities.

⁸ The art of Fiction No. 17, 1957.

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