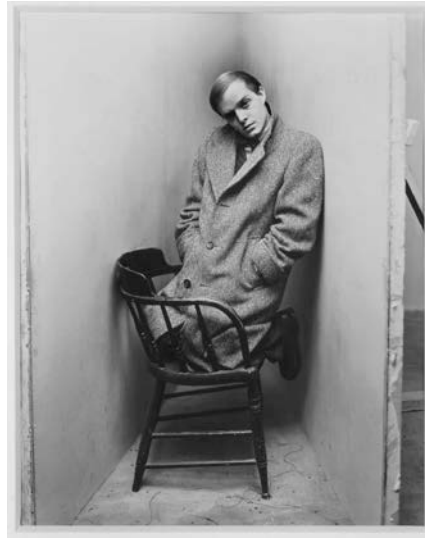


## INTRODUCTION



Truman Capote  
(1924-1984)

For almost forty Years Truman Capote was in the news. He first attracted public interest as a precocious wunderkind of fiction. Later he became known not only for his short stories and novels but also for his nonfiction. His literary reputation was almost equaled by his reputation as a jet-setter. He was a drawing card for interview shows and newspaper features. Any story or article of his, even in his declining years, became a featured work in popular magazines.

Born in New Orleans, September 30, 1924, to Lillie Mae Faulk (later changed to Nina) and Arch Persons, he was named Truman Streckfus Persons. After his parents' divorce and his mother's remarriage, Truman took the surname of his adoptive stepfather and became known only as Truman Capote. He had an unhappy and lonely childhood, which became the subject of much of his work. His sense of abandonment and betrayal remained with him throughout his life.

Capote achieved success at a very young age with the publication of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *A Tree of Night and Other Stories*. Yet some critics objected to or disliked the dark, gothic, psychological strain of the fiction. Some were repelled by the homosexual themes, but other critics praised the style and innovativeness of the work. Two later works of fiction found more favor. *The Grass Harp* and *A Christmas Memory* are tender, poetic, and often-humorous stories, but the theme of the lost child is central in these pieces. A favorite story of most Capote readers is *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, with its unforgettable heroine, Holly Golightly, who dreamed of but failed to find a life of security.

Capote's nonfiction pieces, later published as books, have an enduring quality. Various essays, portraits, and commentaries may be found in Capote collections. The best of these writings, depicts the talented but also the narcissistic, sometimes shallow, often-lonely men and women whom the public and the media transform into twentieth century gods. Capote captures, in his imagistic prose, the materialistic, frenetic world of wealth and fame about which he was ambivalent. He was critical of it but eager to be a part of it.

The high point of Capote's career was reached with *In Cold Blood*, a new form [Hemingway already wrote one, *The Green Hills of Africa*, 1935] that he called a 'nonfiction novel,' part journalism, part creative story. Yet after the publication of that work, it became clear that the man was at odds with the artist. Capote published a series of short stories which were to be part of a projected novel called *Answered Prayers*. It is

the story of the sexual peccadilloes of socialites, artists, dancers, editors, photographers, and film celebrities. Soon after he began the novel, Capote became an isolated, defensive man. At the time of his death, in 1984, that work was incomplete, but it was published posthumously in 1986 as *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel*. Capote's last published work in his lifetime, *Music for Chameleons*, demonstrates that Capote still had, on occasion, a painter's eye and a musician's ear.

Helen S. Garson  
"Truman Capote"  
*Cyclopedia of World Authors II*  
ed. Frank N. Magill  
(Salem 1989) 308-09

