

## Narrative Journalism in Truman Capote's In Cold Blood

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: February 11, 2019            Accepted: February 28, 2019            Published: March 31, 2019            Volume: 2            Issue: 2            DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.2.6">10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.2.6</a></p>	<p>This paper deals with how Narrative Journalism influences the novels in literature with special reference to the non-fiction In Cold Blood by Truman Capote. The author is forced to yield a serious new art form in Literature through Narrative Journalism. To demonstrate the literary techniques of the novel, Capote applied Literary Journalism. In a simple definition, Narrative Journalism is a technique and stylistic strategy traditionally associated with non-fiction, and also it is at times used interchangeably with creative non-fiction. Capote learned of the quadruple murder in The New York Times, before the killers were captured. Then he decided to travel to Kansas and write about the crime with his fellow author Harper Lee who has also written a few non-fictions. Here Capote brings out the true crime story for which he interviewed local residents and investigators assigned to the case and took thousand pages of notes. He also took extensive detail and simultaneous triple narrative. And the story is told from two alternating perspectives; the thought of the murderers and the people affected by the crime. Capote's purpose of writing this novel was to let the readers know about the prior planning, thoughts and purpose of the crime by the murderers that would not be shown in a typical news report. Unlike other authors his objective was in showing the mindset of the murderers while committing the crime. The highlight of the study is how Narrative Journalism is applied in Capote's In Cold Blood.</p>
<b>KEYWORD</b>	
<p><i>Yield; demonstrate; interchangeably; perspectives; triple narrative</i></p>	

Narrative Journalism can be broadly defined as the genre that takes the techniques of fiction and applies them to nonfiction. The narrative form requires deep and sophisticated reporting, an appreciation for storytelling, a departure from the structural conventions of daily news, and an imaginative use of language.

*Narrative journalism* is a form of non-fiction that combines factual reporting with some of the narrative techniques and stylistic strategies traditionally associated with fiction and it is also called *literary journalism*.

In his ground-breaking anthology *The Literary Journalists* (1984), Norman Sims observed that literary journalism "demands immersion in complex, difficult subjects. The voice of the writer surfaces to show that an author is at work."

The term *literary journalism* is sometimes used interchangeably with *creative non-fiction*; more often, however, it is regarded as one *type* of creative nonfiction that contains precise, well-researched

information. According to John Bak, "Literary journalism has often been marginalized as the bastard child of literature and journalism." Literary Journalism are immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people, and accuracy. Literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered.

Indeed, the addition of "literary" to "journalism" may be seen to be dignifying the latter, giving it a modicum of cultural class. While the media exerts enormous political, ideological, and cultural power in societies, journalism retains a precarious position within literary cultures and the academy. Journalism and literature are often seen as two separate spheres: the first one "low," the other "high." Complex factors (historical, cultural, ideological, and political) lie behind this. Since the emergence in the early 17th century in Europe's cities, particularly London, the "news media" have been associated with scandal, gossip and "low" culture. According to Craven, these publications "brought sex and scandal, fantasy, sensationalism, bawdiness, violence and prophecy to

their readers: monstrous births, dragons, mermaids and most horrible murders.”

*In Cold Blood* is an excellent example of Narrative Journalism. It is cold but splendid piece of documentary realism. Capote draws all of the information that he uses to tell about the murders of Herbert Clutter family in the small farming community of Holcomb, Kansas. And he explains about the mindset of the murderers while committing the crime. When Capote learns about the murder in *The New York Times*, he decided to travel to Kansas and write about the crime. Capote goes to Holcomb along with his fellow author Harper Lee. Together they interviewed local residents and investigators assigned to the case and took thousand pages of notes. He ultimately spent six years working on the book. He started to write the book after the two murderers were captured.

*Journalism* made such a splash that lots of journalism departments started teaching courses on the subject in the seventies (as they will in the future on ‘fake news,’ probably)” (Sims,2017).

Thomas B. Connery defined literary journalism is 'nonfiction printed prose whose verifiable content is shaped and transformed into a story or sketch by use of narrative and rhetoric techniques generally associated with fiction.' Through these stories and sketches, authors 'make a statement, or provide an interpretation, about the people and culture depicted.' Norman Sims adds to this definition by suggesting the genre itself allows readers to 'behold others' lives, often set within far clearer contexts than we can bring to our own.' He goes on to suggest, "There is something intrinsically political and strongly democratic about literary journalism something pluralistic, pro-individual, anti-cant, and anti-elite."

*Operación Masacre* was the first “non-fiction” novel by Rodolfo Walsh completed in the year 1957. Followed by it in the year 1965, Truman Capote wrote *In Cold Blood*, the first English language book and it established itself as a historic example of literary Journalism in the form of novel. While holding to the guidelines of journalism, this novel helped to evidence writers the possibility of using creative techniques. Though Capote claims to have invented this new form of journalism, the origin of creative writing in journalism has occurred much earlier.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, works of Daniel Defoe and Mark Twain have the characteristics of narrative journalism along with Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck writings also have the essence of journalistic narration during the period of World War II. Tom Wolfe wrote *The New Journalism* in 1947 and is being credited for popularizing discussion on the propriety of narrative in journalism.

When one attempts to define journalistic narrative, the first problem is the ambiguity between the terms narrative and story, often considered equivalent in everyday life. Without even entering into narratological distinctions, narrative and story must be distinguished in journalism.

A journalistic narrative can be defined as a story in which characters perform actions unfolding over time in a certain setting. The journalist uses writing techniques often considered as “literary.” These include the use of voice, techniques that allow creating a form of experience for the reader. The final goal of a journalistic narrative is to offer a better understanding of the real world, which implies that every detail has to be accurately reported.



Thomas Connery, currently emeritus professor of communication and journalism at the University of St Thomas, Minnesota, and author of *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (1992), taught a course titled “Journalism and Literature” on a master’s program at Ohio State University in the early 1970s and led modules in “New Journalism” in the early 1980s (Connery, 2017).

According to Norman Sims, author of the seminal *The Literary Journalists* (1984): “I think you should look to the 1970s or 1980s in the US for the true start of literary journalism as a discipline. *The New*

If this conception of narrative should be distinguished from the reports, journalists usually refer to as "stories," it should also be distinguished from scholarly concepts such as the notion of récit médiatique, which is translated as "media narrative." Marc Lits, among others, introduced this notion because he thinks that a narrative prototype is central in the media, so central that it even pervades the other text types one can find in the media (1997, 45).

Media narrative is thus a notion much broader than narrative as narratologists or linguists define it. It is a text – in the very broad sense of an "abstract entity" (1997, 45) – that organizes real pre-existing material at least partly according to a narrative logic or around narrative elements (a beginning, middle and end, characters, etc.) and "whose individual and collective refiguration [the third phase of Ricoeur's triple mimesis, during which readers "receive" the narrative], which creates identity, is taken into account, with its social roots" (1997, 45).

The primary genre Capote uses in this novel is a fairly new form of writing, New Journalism coined by author Thomas Wolfe, American author in 1960s. It combines elements of the genre of Journalism and Narrative Literature. Journalism aims to tell a factually accurate story, using carefully researched and collected information from a variety of reliable sources.

Predominantly, journalism is fact-based and reflects more than one point of view. Narrative literature strives to do none of the above. Instead, it strives to tell a compelling story through well-developed characters and an intriguing plot. In work of New Journalism, authors use the meticulous research methods of journalism to collect information that is then shared in the form of long, narrative story, complete with multi-layered characters and a plot that builds and eventually resolves. At the same time, they also strive to make a large social or political commentary.

Capote's structure *In Cold Blood* is a subject that deserves discussion. The book is told from two alternating perspectives, that of the Clutter family who are the victims, and that of the two murderers, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. The different perspectives allow the reader to relive both sides of the story; Capote presents them without bias. Capote masterfully utilizes the third person omniscient point of view to express the two perspectives. The non-chronological sequencing of some events emphasizes key scenes. The third person point of view also reaffirms Capote's neutrality.



The victims, the murderers, the victims, the murderers, this is the pattern throughout the first two of the three parts of *In Cold Blood*. During these first two parts of the novel, the reader is gathering pieces of puzzle leading up to the slaughtering of the Clutter family. Ultimately, the paths of the murderers and their victims come together and climax in the multiple shotgun murders.

The alternating perspective enables the reader to assimilate both sides of the story. For example, in part one, "Nancy and her music tutee, Jolene Katz, were also satisfied..." (24). whereas the next section begins "The two young men Dick and Perry had little in common, but they did not realize it, for they shared a number of surface traits" (30).

This nonfiction work is for the most part unbiased. Capote's extensive research on this real-life event is not marred by his own personal feelings about the crime committed. The fact that he tells both sides of the story adds to the objectivity. Capote doesn't render judgment for two reasons: it is important for the reader to draw conclusions about the "philosophical-sociological-psychological circumstances of the mass murder," and Capote concluded that there should be no interference with the readers' judgmental process (Reed 107). The narrator, up to the criminals' day of execution, shows no bias whatsoever; the trial could have been an easy opportunity for the narrator to express his own opinions on how the criminals should be punished. Capote is adamant in giving the facts to the reader directly and letting the reader formulate his or her own opinion. For example, of the death sentence, Capote writes, "In March 1965, after [Perry] Smith and [Dick] Hickock had been confined in their death row cells almost two thousand days, the Kansas Supreme Court decreed that their lives must end between midnight and 2:00 A.M., Wednesday, April 14, 1965" (336).

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