

CAPOTE:

In 1967 director Richard Brooks made the movie "In Cold Blood." To this reviewer, it is still one of the most remarkable, disturbing, haunting and nightmarish films of all time. It was based on a book written by Truman Capote.

In 1959, Capote saw an article in a newspaper column about four members of the Clutter family being brutally murdered in Holcomb, Kansas. Calling an editor from The New Yorker, he was given the go ahead to do a story. It became his obsession and it was a career move that launched him to stardom, yet it began the demise of his own life.

Traveling with Harper Lee (played by Catherine Keener), Capote (played magnificently by Philip Seymour Hoffman), needs to win the trust of its citizens to get his story. Initially, his angle was to see how the rural community coped with the tragedy. He coldly tells a Kansas police investigator "I don't care one way or another if you catch who did this."

Perry Smith (played by Clifton Collins, Jr.) and Dick Hickock are caught, brought to trial and found guilty. Dick is the organizer, cold and ruthless. Perry is introspective and a painter. He chews a handful of aspirins at a time for his pain.

As Capote needs the trust of the killers to tell his story, something changes. He spends a lot of time with Perry and begins to feel pity for him.

He begins to see that Perry's young life and his own mirror each other. A bond is formed between them. At one point, Capote says, "It's like Perry and I grew up in the same house, and one day he went out the back door and I went out the front."

But there grows a conflict. Capote needs their death to finish the book. Yet, he needs them, especially Perry, to give him the details of that fateful night. Capote agonized for six years.

"If I leave here without understanding you," Capote tells Perry during one visit, "the world will see you as a monster. I don't want that."

Director Bennett Miller and scriptwriter Dan Futterman, have created an unusually bold and gutsy film. There are no prisoners here. We see two pathetic individuals that have murdered. We see a writer whose career takes off after his brilliant book is finished, as he created a new style of writing nonfiction. He became the life of every party. He became a celebrity on late night talk shows. We see Capote's dilemma and fall.

Hoffman is right on in this role. Catherine Keener, who plays Harper Lee, became the prize winning author of "To Kill a Mockingbird." She seems to understand his pain, but realizes Capote is betraying the two killers and his sense of moral values. And all for a story.

Those who saw Capote on television in the 1960s, and now in this film, wonder, how could this wimpy, raspy voiced little man with such bizarre mannerisms write such a ferocious novel. He had a way with words and he had a way with people.

As he tried to win the confidence of a little girl witness in Kansas, he tells her, "Ever since I was a child, folks have thought they had me pegged, because of the way I am, the way I talk." Capote was an enigma.

Perry and Dick went through several appeals, one financed by Capote's newspaper. Capote was consumed. The book couldn't be finished without their deaths. Capote knew the book was good, he just needed that ending. He tells his friend Harper Lee, "If they win this appeal, I may have a complete nervous breakdown. There wasn't anything I could have done to save them."

"Maybe," she says, "but the fact is you didn't want to."

When Perry is executed, the barn-like warehouse looks exactly the same as in the film "In Cold Blood" from 1965. That hanging ended in a cleansing rain storm, this one ended in a seemingly calm, and peaceful night.

Near the end, Capote asks Perry how much money they made that night. "Forty to fifty dollars," Perry tells him. All at the cost of four lives.

Capote never finished another novel.

114 Minutes

MPAA Rating: R (for some violent images and brief strong language)

RATING: A-

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