

Littérature anglophone | Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*

Opening lines | Analysis

The literary device used here is a **comparison**. It accentuates how desolate the place seems to be. This **bleak** and **bare** landscape creates the feeling of sadness or fright. Comparing grain elevators to Greek Temples is **very unexpected**. It turns something very common into a masterpiece in a desolate place. Plus, it creates a **religious atmosphere** as if this town was impenetrable – just like a temple.

The narrator employs a rather **condescending tone**: "*Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see...*". He is seeing this area **from a more refined** and, perhaps, from even a **more sophisticated perspective**. He has a **sarcastic manner** when talking about Holcomb. The narrator is very **detached**. It seems that he is used to living in a more attractive place. He probably is **from the city** and from a **middle-class / posh** background. He must be a **fashionable middle-class lefty** kind of man.

In this expression, there is an **enumeration of adjectives based on the same pattern** (affix <-un> indicating an opposite or a reversal.). This list of adjectives strengthens **[reinforces]** the impression of a **desolate place** as if no one seems to care about knowing the streets names. It conveys an idea of "**no man's land**". There is an impression of **abandonment and desolation**. This enumeration has also something **rather poetic** in itself. It creates a **repetitive rhythm** which accentuates the **narrator's boredom and weariness**. Indeed, *In Cold Blood* has been **lauded [praised]** for its eloquent prose and extensive detail.

Life in Holcomb seems **dull, flat** and **extremely ordinary** – not to say boring. The village with its inhabitants is a **ghostly community**. There is nothing to see and nothing really happens there. Holcomb seems stuck / **frozen in time**.

At first sight, we may think of a western novel ("Stetson", "high-heeled boots", "nasalness", "prairies") but the final lines of the extract make us think of a **thriller** or a **crime story**. The question is: 'How could four shots kill six people?' (*In fact, the novel is a true crime story.*)

→ **Background information:**

In Cold Blood is a non-fiction novel by American author Truman Capote, first published in 1966; it details the 1959 murders of four members of the Herbert Clutter family in the small farming community of Holcomb, Kansas. When Capote learned of the quadruple murder, before the killers were captured, he decided to travel to Kansas and write about the crime. He was accompanied by his childhood friend and fellow author Harper Lee, and together they interviewed local residents and investigators assigned to the case and took thousands of pages of notes. The killers, Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Smith, were arrested six weeks after the murders and later executed by the state of Kansas, and Capote ultimately spent six years working on the book. When finally published, *In Cold Blood* was an instant success, and today is the second-biggest-selling true crime book in publishing history, behind Vincent Bugliosi's 1974 book *Helter Skelter* about the Manson murders.

(*Wikipedia*).



Truman Capote



Philip Seymour Hoffman