



Other Voices, Other Rooms

Truman Capote

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Published when Truman Capote was only twenty-three years old, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is a literary touchstone of the mid-twentieth century. In this semiautobiographical coming-of-age novel, thirteen-year-old Joel Knox, after losing his mother, is sent from New Orleans to live with the father who abandoned him at birth. But when Joel arrives at Skully's Landing, the decaying mansion in rural Alabama, his father is nowhere to be found. Instead, Joel meets his morose stepmother, Amy, eccentric cousin Randolph, and a defiant little girl named Idabel, who soon offers Joel the love and approval he seeks.

Fueled by a world-weariness that belied Capote's tender age, this novel tempers its themes of waylaid hopes and lost innocence with an appreciation for small pleasures and the colorful language of its time and place.

This new edition, featuring an enlightening Introduction by John Berendt, offers readers a fresh look at Capote's emerging brilliance as a writer of protean power and effortless grace.

From the Hardcover edition.

Other Voices, Other Rooms Details

Date : Published February 1st 1994 by Vintage (first published 1948)

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From Reader Review Other Voices, Other Rooms for online ebook

Doug says

Southern Gothic on steroids and/or mushrooms.

During a recent re-read of *To Kill a Mockingbird* I learned that Harper Lee and Truman Capote were childhood friends and that each of them had based a character in their novels on each other.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ms. Lee based Dill Harris on Mr. Capote and in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* Mr. Capote based Idabel Thompkins on Ms. Lee. They both describe these quirky characters so affectionately that the affection became contagious for me. Maybe it isn't surprising then that Dill and Idabel are my favorite characters in each of these novels.

I also appreciated many of the other eccentric characters in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* but I stopped short of loving them. Capote's writing is impressive for a 23 year old author, sure enough; it's poetic and powerful at times but, to me, most of the characters didn't get fleshed out enough and often felt more like caricatures than characters. (I didn't feel this way at all about the characters in Capote's second published novel, *The Grass Harp*. I was much more impressed by the "realness" and believability of the characters in that novel.)

I also think this novel suffers a bit from Truman Capote being a precocious 23 year old and trying a bit too hard to impress with bells and whistles in his language. For me, there are too many long convoluted sentences here, too many unbroken paragraphs, too much ornamentation and frill, too much could-be-a-dream-or-could-be-really-happening. If you like that sort of thing, definitely check this out. In that respect, it really is quite "artistic". I tend to prefer language that is more simple and straightforward. ...Unless it's Pynchon or James Joyce.

I liked the first two sections, but I couldn't tell you what happened in the final section. I read the last 30 pages twice and still didn't get it. Either he was having fever dreams or he came across some toadstools in the woods on the way to the Cloud Hotel.

Vit Babenco says

Sometimes childhood can be seen in a Gothic light.

The windows of the house are cracked and shattered, hollow as eyeless sockets; a rotted balcony leans perilously forward, and yellow sunflower birds hide their nests in its secret places; the scaling outer walls are ragged with torn, weather-faded posters that flutter when there is a wind. Among the town kids it is a sign of great valor to enter these black rooms after dark and signal with a match-flame from a window on the topmost floor.

Although *Other Voices, Other Rooms* doesn't feature anything supernatural or otherworldly it boasts an enchantingly morose Gothic attitude.

It was at this point that he saw the queer lady. She was holding aside the curtains of the left

corner window, and smiling and nodding at him, as if in greeting or approval; but she was no one Joel had ever known: the hazy substance of her face, the suffused marshmallow features, brought to mind his own vaporish reflection in the wavy chamber mirror. And her white hair was like the wig of a character from history: a towering pale pompadour with fat dribbling curls.

The atmosphere of gloomy enigma is mysteriously magnetizing.

And as every Gothic novel should do *Other Voices, Other Rooms* contains a dire secret.

A child is a seed of an adult...

Lawyer says

Other Voices, Other Rooms: Capote's Swamp Baroque Concerto in Three Movements

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.--Truman Capote, *The Dogs Bark*, New York, Random House, 1973

First Edition

Having just re-read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, I returned to *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote, her childhood friend. Truman Capote became a literary sensation at a much younger age with the publication of a number of short stories beginning in 1945. I first read Capote's debut novel for Professor O.B. Emerson's Southern Literature Class in 1973 at the University of Alabama. In the flurry of a hectic semester, Capote's first novel made little impression on me. My reaction is much different as I write this.

If you've ever questioned what Southern Gothic literature is, look no further than *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. All the elements are here: a journey from light to darkness, a former resort hotel crumbling into ruin as a result of local legends that guests abandoned their summers there after following others drowning in the lake on the hotel property, among other references to superstition and an unfolding spiral into the grotesque. In Capote, biographer Gerald Clarke said the novel surpassed Gothic and referred to it as "Swamp Baroque."

Thirteen Joel Harrison Knox is cast adrift when his mother dies. He and his mother were abandoned by his father, Edward Sansom when he was only a year old. While staying with relatives in New Orleans, Joel is shocked to receive a letter in spidery red ink on green stationery from his father, along with funds to travel to his home in Scully's Landing near Noon City, Alabama. Young Joel travels by train and bus to a small town that could easily pass for Monroeville, Alabama, or if you prefer, "Maycomb."

From Noon City, Joel is carried out to the family home by Jesus Fever, so ancient that most often he appears to be sleeping. However, Jesus' mule, John Brown is used to the journey and Joel finds himself without incident at Scully's Landing.

However, his father is nowhere to be seen. Rather, he meets his stepmother, Amy and her Cousin Randolph who actually owns the property. Randolph dominates Amy as he owns the house in which she and Joel's father live. Randolph's sexuality is subtly revealed through the progress of the novel. He frequently wears

flowing kimonos with butterfly sleeves. He summons Joel to his room, naked but for a breakfast tray over his genital area. He is large, soft, and his skin glows with a pink flush whenever Joel is in his presence. He discusses love with Joel who does not understand him.

“The brain may take advice, but not the heart, and love, having no geography, knows no boundaries: weight and sink it deep, no matter, it will rise and find the surface: and why not? any love is natural and beautiful that lies within a person's nature; only hypocrites would hold a man responsible for what he loves, emotional illiterates and those of righteous envy, who, in their agitated concern, mistake so frequently the arrow pointing to heaven for the one that leads to hell.”

At various times, Joel sees a woman appear at the windows of the home, dressed in a white gown, her hair falling in long curling ringlets. When Joel questions Amy and Randolph about the mysterious woman, Randolph ignores the question, while Amy asks, "Randolph, you haven't been..." which earns her a kick under the table and a slap from Randolph.

To Joel's dismay, he discovers his father is an invalid, unable to communicate, other than to drop a tennis ball when he needs attention. This is not what Joel had expected, although he had written to one of his friends that his father was tall, smoked a pipe and knew all about airplanes. Yes, there's a good deal in common between Joel and Dill Harris. Both bend the world to shape their hopes and expectations.

And, just as Capote served Harper Lee as model for Dill Harris, we find a young Harper Lee serving as model for Idabel Thompkins, a tomboy who refuses to wear girl's clothing, but would prefer to romp through the woods, swamps, fishing and skinny dipping. Idabel calls Joel "Sissybritches." Joel describes her more as boy than girl with a low and husky voice.

Joel has hair almost white, his face with delicate features. Capote describes him as so pretty to be a boy. Yet, on a fishing trip with Idabel, after she declares the catfish aren't biting, she produces a bar of Ivory and suggests they bathe together. Joel is shocked. Idabel is nonplussed.

“With an exceedingly contemptuous expression, Idabel drew up to her full height. "Son," she said, and spit between her fingers, "what you've got in your britches is no news to me, and no concern of mine: hell, I've fooled around with nobody but boys since first grade. I never think like I'm a girl; you've got to remember that, or we can't never be friends." For all its bravado, she made this declaration with a special and compelling innocence; and when she knocked one fist against the other, as, frowning, she did now, and said: "I want so much to be a boy: I would be a sailor, I would..." the quality of her futility was touching.”

As they bathe, Joel notices the beginning of a swell of her breasts. He notices the suggestion of a widening of the hips. However, when he is drawn to kiss her cheek, Idabel rebuffs him, telling him if he cannot respond to her as a brother, they cannot be friends.

Much remains to be revealed. Capote's novel is one of self discovery and the realization of one's sexual identity. He writes beautifully. Capote's use of language is lyrical, with sections that could easily be considered poetry as opposed to prose. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is deeply introspective, exploring themes of the nature of love, isolation, and the search for family, which appears repeatedly in Capote's other works.

Capote's debut novel burst on the literary scene in 1948. Other works appearing that year were *The Naked*

and the Dead by Norman Mailer and The Young Lions by Irwin Shaw. However, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* hit the best seller's list and quickly sold twenty-six thousand copies.

First Edition, Random House, New York, 1948

Reaction among literary critics in New York were largely unfavorable, with the exception of the review appearing in the New York Herald. Interestingly, reviews from Heartland America, extending down to Dallas, Texas, embraced Capote as an inspired writer for the coming generation.

The author's photograph on the back of the jacket attracted almost as much attention as the contents of the book. Harold Halma had taken the photograph in 1947. Per Wikipedia: "Walking on Fifth Avenue, Halma overheard two middle-aged women looking at a Capote blowup in the window of a bookstore. When one woman said, 'I'm telling you: he's just young,' the other woman responded, 'And I'm telling you, if he isn't young, he's dangerous!' Capote delighted in retelling this anecdote."

Author's photo on dust jacket back

However, the sultry, seductive photograph, almost overshadowed Capote's literary work. The photograph became the subject of criticism or ridicule, with Mad Magazine spoofing the portrait. Capote responded that the photograph had been a candid shot taken by Halma and that he had not posed for the picture which was patently untrue.

While Capote was young, only twenty-three at the time of the novel's publication, he was of no danger to the ladies Halma had overheard. Capote had been accepted to the Yaddo Colony for Writers in 1946. While there he became sexually involved with literary professor Harold Doughty. Capote fell out of that relationship into another with literary critic Newton Arvin, to whom *Other Voices, Other Rooms* Capote dedicated the novel.

This novel established for Capote the fame and celebrity he would seek throughout his life. A quest that ultimately destroyed him.

caricature from David Levine

Highly recommended. This is a **4.5 Star Read**.

Jay says

“Other Voices, Other Rooms”
by Truman Capote

Book Review by Jay Gilbertson

This is maybe the eighth, could be the ninth time I've read this amazing little novel and I know for certain

I'll read it again one day. Billed as Capote's first, and in my opinion his best work, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is truly an amazing piece of literature and still haunts me today.

The author took a classic coming-of-age theme and carefully, subtly and with fascinatingly flawed characters—ripped it to smithereens! The story centers around two powerful topics that Capote struggled with his entire life: the search for a father-figure and the struggle with sexual orientation. What carries this tale is Capote's brilliant prose and impeccable descriptions of place. He is one of the more rare authors that compel the reader to constantly re-read certain passages not because they're confusing but due to the incredible picture the author presents of thirteen-year-old, Joel Knox, on the brink of manhood.

Give this a try:

"...He lay there on a bed of cold pebbles, the cool water washing, rippling over him; he wished he were a leaf, like the current-carried leaves riding past: leaf-boy, he would float lightly away, float and fade into a river, an ocean, the world's great flood."

With the death of Joel's mother early on in the story, he is sent off to live with his estranged father in a dilapidated old hotel that, like its occupants, is further sinking into disrepair. From the psychotic step-mother, Miss Amy, to her eccentric cousin, Randolph, to the crusty-cook, Zoo, there isn't a stereotype left to imagine. Throw in Idabel and Florabel, twins as different as they are alike, and you've got a brew of misfits that will surround you with color and sparkle contrasted with loneliness and despair at every turn. One jarring element that any modern reader will find uncomfortable to read is Capote's use of the 'N' word. Though common back when this work was first published, it seems appropriate within the story and adds yet another layer to this complex cast.

Another of the many fascinating characters is not a person, but an old resort called Cloud Hotel. It too is a falling apart place with a history that will burn into your imagination and leave you wanting to know more. Though I've read everything Capote ever wrote, it's this novel I return to because like some poetry, each reading I find some new gem to marvel and wonder about.

Like this clever title-weave-in:

"...But Little Sunshine stayed on: it was his rightful home, he said, for if he went away, as he had once upon a time, other voices, other rooms, voices lost and clouded, strummed his dreams..."

Oh and there's also a midget and a woman with a huge wart on her chin and a one-armed barber and a cat named Toby. And of course, there's a woman in the window and you won't believe who that turns out to be—or perhaps you will.

For more information about the author visit:

www.capotetbio.com

Brian says

"*Other Voices Other Rooms*" is at times massively confusing, intensely beautiful, and mystical. Often, all at the same time. Capote's command and use of language and style is unquestionably brilliant, and many times the text reads like poetry. Capote is simply a masterful composer of language. Every word in its rightful place.

Capote also has the gift that many writers lack and that is a descriptive prowess that completely surrounds the reader and engulfs them in the world of the text. The first time that Idabel describes the history of the Cloud Hotel to Joel the reader finds themselves seeing this world materialize in front of their eyes. To be so completely lost in a work speaks highly of the writer's abilities!

Another great strength of this text is how accurately it displays how a child left to his own devices has to create and interpret the world around him. Joel is left to figure out the world for himself, and considering his age and limited experience he does a decent job of it. Joel's interpretations of the world are oftentimes not concrete, or even accurate, and this is where the adult reader will find themselves at moments confused. Reread, it will be worth it.

The main theme of this novel is love and acceptance, and how we all pine for it from our earliest memories. Every character longs for it in some form. The successful ones find it first in themselves. The recognition of that is the greatest achievement in this text, and the scariest.

Diane Barnes says

I read this many years ago, and remember liking it, but not much else. I suppose I considered it well written, and wanted to read everything Capote had done, as I really loved *IN COLD BLOOD*, and was fascinated by the little man with the squeaky voice that I saw on television. In interviews, he was fearless, and said the most shocking things he could think of, because he loved the attention.

This time around though, I think it's one of the saddest things I've ever read. Semi-autobiographical, it's a first novel from a 23 year old who simply wants to be loved for who and what he is. He said himself that he wrote the novel to exorcise some demons. Reading between the lines after knowing a little about his life, now makes this not just a novel from gifted author, but an explanation of the man he became in later years.

One of the best characters, Idabell Thompkins, was based on the real life Harper Lee, a childhood friend. I think it explains a lot about her demons as well. Many thanks to the voters of On The Southern Literary Trail for choosing this as this month's selection. I enjoyed every beautiful word.

Suvi says

Why is it that when I find a book worthy of five stars I'm at a loss for words, and can't write anything sensible about it? Well, let's just say that I fell head over heels with Capote after this one. One hundred percent more skill than his friend Harper Lee. The way Capote uses words is simple yet it creates a strong sense of place. The lack of plot doesn't really matter for me personally, because there's everything I could ever need from a Southern Gothic novel. Eccentric characters, ambiguous sexuality, abandoned houses, weird stories told by even weirder people, suffocating sense of alienation, dream-like sequences and overall cigarette and brandy fumed melancholia.

Michael says

As perplexing as it is captivating, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is Capote's hallucinatory literary debut, a Southern Gothic bildungsroman based partially on its writer's experience of growing up gay in rural Alabama. The novel wavers between the surreal and the familiar, the obvious and the mystifying; all the while, Capote's ornate language and labyrinthine syntax entrance his reader, inviting them to dwell in a consistently disturbing setting. The plot concerns thirteen-year-old Joel Knox's move after his mother's death to live with his father at Skully's Landing, a rotting mansion inhabited by eccentric figures on the outskirts of a small town. As a kind of subversion of the coming-of-age novel, though, neither the story nor the protagonist's character arc are all that important: Joel doesn't change over the course of the narrative so much

as he changes how he feels about what he already is at its start. The novel is far more interested in sketching and sympathizing with different kinds of marginal existence, stressing their stagnancy, as well as critiquing American society for its contempt of Black and queer life. The ending reads as especially bleak, once one moves beyond the initial shock induced by its switch to the stream-of-consciousness mode.

Dagio_maya says

"Si sentiva escluso, privo di identità, un ragazzo di pietra su un piedistallo di legno fradicio"

INCIPIT

Chi deve recarsi a Noon City non può che servirsi di un mezzo di fortuna, poiché non vi sono né treni né corriere che vadano in quella direzione; c'è solo un camion della Chuberry Turpentine Company che sei giorni la settimana preleva merci e posta a Paradise Chapel, la città più vicina; e qualche volta chi è diretto a Neon City può ottenere un passaggio dal conducente del camion, Sam Radclif. Ma con qualsiasi mezzo ci si vada, si tratta di un viaggio disagiata perché le strade, corrugate come assi da bucato, sono tali da sgangherare anche il veicolo più solido

Mi sono completamente immersa in questa storia: gotica nella misura in cui aleggiano atmosfere misteriose.

Mi sono completamente immersa in una scrittura che dipinge paesaggi ed anime sofferenti impegnate nello sforzo quotidiano di innalzare mura di difesa.

Esseri fragili nascosti in stanze segrete dove si può diventare protagonisti acclamati di una vita che nella realtà rinnega la nostra identità.

Mi sono completamente immersa in questo viaggio dall'infanzia a l'età adulta.

Il viaggio di un ragazzo che deve attraversare il guado cercando di far attenzione a distinguere bene il passaggio perché quando si hanno dodici anni i limiti tra sogno e realtà si confondono facilmente. L'istinto è quello di fuggire ma in fondo Joel è consapevole che:

" qualora su ne fosse andato - come aveva fatto una volta - altre voci, altre stanze, voci perdute e fievoli, sarebbero echeggiate nei suoi sogni

Mariel says

Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is more of a raising yourself through experiences and colored glasses- green, red, rose, purple, the whole over the rainbow spectrum- world views than coming of age. The painful growth into what you think you are, and who you really are. I'm more and more irritated with "coming of age" tag these days, since I can't accept that there's this point where one comes to this point, and then you're done. It's more like stops and starts, backwards and forwards, all mixed together confusion, isn't it? It can't just be me? We aren't always grown up in memories, anyway, despite that 20/20 hindsight some people supposedly have (it'd help to have Capote's 100% conversational recall). I'm still little, sometimes. I love this book. I get the feeling that the people I've met who've read Capote don't feel this kinda gratitude that I feel towards him. Like maybe they wanna say, "Dude, Mariel, it's just a book" and back away slowly and then run away as fast as they can. I kinda did raise myself through movies and stories and stuff (probably

still do), and I feel strong connections to characters, as if they were real people. I relate to how Joel made up these fictions to get by, like about the deadbeat father, or his dying mama. How he does the same with the new people he meets, most of whom are living their own fictions. All in Capote's humanist way that doesn't care about the bullshit. He sees them without judgement or sorrow. "You do know they aren't real, Mariel?" I've been (to my mind, snottily) asked fairly often. But they are! Someone wrote them. And aha! In the case of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Idabel was based on the same little girl whom Harper Lee based Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* on. Capote and Lee grew up with her. So she is real *smug*. (I'd not have forgotten about this girl either.)

This story is kinda sick feeling in the can't look away possibly impending disaster of the future, and more than in just the southern gothic way of the times that uses background for inherent creepiness (I'm from southern usa so it will either feel like home or trying too hard for me). I'm haunted by this shedding your skins feeling and rejecting yourself, and losing fantasies you made for yourself to hide from ugly realities, and getting lost in the pretensions and ugly realities of those other people, in all those other places. I can understand memories feeling like the sick hot days like these. Hear the doom drumbeats of all those original people doing their thing to their own drums. Watching other people like this. It took me twice as long as the usual coming of age story to not feel skinless. I'm grateful to Capote for writing this book that can relate to that feeling of being lost. And for feeling like we're in together. Yeah, I know it's just a book. I don't care.

K.D. Absolutely says

In 1935, at an early age of 11, Capote began writing. The first novel that he attempted to write was *Summer Crossing* but one day, while he and a fellow southerner and writer Carlson McCullers, the author of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), were walking in the woods, he got inspired to write something about the rural life in the South. So, he set *Summer Crossing* aside and wrote this book. This then became his first published book (1948) when Capote was 24 years old. The style is Southern Gothic and it is semi-autobiographical.

This is semi-autobiographical because what he wrote was mostly based on his actual experiences in Monroeville, Alabama where he grew up with the 1961 Pulitzer winner, Harper Lee, author of the modern classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Capote and Lee were best of friends so they made each other as character in their own respective novels. Harper Lee's character called **Dill** was based on Truman as a boy and Capote's **Idabel Thompkins** in this book was based on the tomboyish Harper Lee when she was a young girl. This 1948 book did not win Capote any award but it stayed in the *New York Times Bestseller* list for 9 weeks. After 13 years, Harper Lee came up with her only novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and it did not only win her a Pulitzer but also the hearts of many people around the world.

This book may not have made an impact as strong as *Mockingbird* but Capote's writing is as good, if not even better, than Harper Lee's. The only thing missing here, I guess, is that it did not tackle social and racial inequality issue but rather focused on those minor themes that are also present in *Mockingbird* such as courage, compassion, decadence and isolation. Both books have Gothic southern elements but Lee used it for humor while Capote used it for mystery if not to actually scare. So, overall, I agree that *Mockingbird* is a notch higher than this debut novel of Capote.

The story revolves around a 13-y/o boy **Joel Knox** whose mother has just died. One day, he receives a letter from his father inviting him to live with him in a place called Skully's Landing. Joel does not know his father because he was an infant when his father abandoned him and his mother. Left with no choice, he travels all by himself from New Orleans to his father's house. Before seeing his father, he meets all the other people in

the town including the sisters **Florabel** and **Idabel Thompkins**. They become his friends particularly Idabel. Towards the end of the novel, Joel finally meets his father and he is shocked to find out his father's condition. Prior to that meeting he had high expectations on what his life would be with his father even writing rosy pictures to his friend back in New Orleans.

My favorite scene is one of those first few encounters of Joel Knox (Capote) and Idabel Thompkins (Harper Lee). Idabel asks Joel if he has been snakebit. Joel says no but he has survived being ran down by a car. Florabel (Idabel's sister) says "now Idabel will think of having herself run down by a car." This reminded me when I was young and I got to argue with my playmates who had a better toy or who had the richer father or who had gone to a farther place - city or town, etc. That scene made me laugh imagining how the tomboyish Idabel would have been behaving considering the very vivid descriptions Capote spent in his prose for that girl.

This is the last Capote book on my bookshelf. I am not yet his completist as far as his novels are concerned because I could not find a copy of *The Grass Harp* (1951). But as far as those that are available, here are they - fully read with many of their pages now dogeared (proof that I enjoyed reading them):

4 STARS (I really liked these!):
and

3 STARS (I liked these!):
, , and

Now, I just have to hunt for this book:

.
THE GRASS HARP

...then I will be his completist.

Camie says

After his mother's death Joel Knox is summoned to the decaying Mississippi mansion Skully's Landing to meet the father who abandoned him and runs smack dab into a menagerie of odd characters namely an addled stepmother Amy, silk kimono dressed Uncle Randolph, barely alive bedridden father Mr. Samson, and the wild girl child Idabel who all exist in some kind of dreamlike narrative.

I've read ICB and BAT so Capote is not a new author for me. I understand this is supposed to be semi-autobiographical and that the character Idabel is supposedly based roughly on his childhood friend Harper Lee, but even those facts couldn't interest me in (or help me understand) this story. A GR friend Doug called this one Southern Gothic on steroids or mushrooms. I'm going with mushrooms , lol, and giving myself extra credit (big time) for finishing it.

A book which for me started out confusing and strange and by the end just left me completely and uncaringly baffled. 2 stars

Read for May On The Southern Literary Trail

Rachel says

It wasn't until after seeing "Capote" (excellent film, by the by) that I got the itch to read something by the

film's namesake. Thus far my first choice, "In Cold Blood," has been checked out every time I've gone to the library, so I settled instead for his first novel, "Other Voices, Other Rooms."

I was not surprised to see the young protagonist, Joel, as a reflection of Capote himself. What did interest me, however, was that in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition I was reading, Capote wrote a forward in which he claimed that it wasn't until re-reading the novel twenty-five years later that he "realized" that the boy was a version of himself. Whatever.

As far as the writing goes, Capote's prose is gorgeous, his physical descriptions lush and intricate, and the Southern vernacular is spot-on. It is easy to see why people were so taken with the novel; the reader sees and smells and feels everything he writes with stunning clarity.

In keeping with a Gothic tradition, however, Capote included some supernatural elements that actually felt really out of place. Some of them never got resolved (the old lady?!)...which perhaps I could have forgiven if the ending had any sort of resolution. It didn't. It felt almost like Capote had written himself into a corner and had no other way of ending than to construct something so far out that the reader was baffled enough to believe it was deep and thought-provoking. It kind of ruined the book for me, actually.

There's some good writing here, but not enough to compensate for the lack of continuity and some bizarre Gothic ploys that really detract from the flow of the main story. I'm not giving up on Truman yet, though, and would like to read more of his later works.

Ginny_1807 says

Bellissimo romanzo di formazione, disseminato di riferimenti autobiografici, che l'autore riveste di una fitta rete di simboli di innegabile fascino.

Il viaggio del tredicenne Joel Harrison Knox verso un luogo sperduto nella campagna del profondo Sud degli Stati Uniti, per incontrare il padre che non conosce, è innanzi tutto la toccante vicenda di un adolescente assetato di affetti; insieme, però, è anche una rappresentazione paradigmatica del processo di crescita, ovvero dell'abbandono definitivo dell'ingenuità ovattata propria dell'infanzia per l'acquisizione dell'autonomia e di una fiera consapevolezza finalmente adulta.

Sia nei temi che nei toni, il racconto mutua elementi caratteristici dei generi letterari più disparati: dal gotico al fiabesco, dall'avventura al mystery; con imprevedibili esiti di straniamento e di suspense.

Il protagonista, nel suo candore e nel suo sgomento, viene proiettato in un ambiente ignoto, imprevisto e sconcertante; una specie di non-luogo, lontano dalle consuetudini del mondo civilizzato e abitato da personaggi eccentrici e ambigui. In questa atmosfera come sospesa tra realtà e sogno (o incubo?) si acquiscono le sue paure e si dilata il suo senso di solitudine; mentre sullo sfondo prende forma un paesaggio di chiara eco Faulkneriana, che riflette al contempo la magnificenza e il declino di un mondo e delle sue presunte certezze.

Grande letteratura.

Suzy says

I loved this when I first read it in my early 20's, but I couldn't remember anything about it as I reread it. I really liked it this time around, primarily for the poetic and magical writing that placed me right there – sights, sounds, smells - in this dreamlike Southern Gothic story.

Thirteen-year-old Joel Knox recently lost his mother and is living with his Aunt Ellen in New Orleans. One day a letter from his father, who had not been heard from for twelve years, summons Joel to Skully's Landing, Alabama to live with him . . . permanently. It is no easy trick to get there – days of trains, buses, a supply truck get him to the nearest town where no one is present to meet him. Finally, a mule-drawn cart driven by Jesus Fever, a wizened 104-year-old black man who works for his father, shows up to drive Joel to The Landing. It's late at night and Jesus falls asleep at the wheel, so to speak, but John Brown the mule guides them safely home.

“Relaxed as a rag doll, Joel was stretched on a croquer-sack mattress, his legs dangling over the wagon's end. A vine-like latticework of stars frosted the southern sky, and with his eyes he interlinked these spangled vines till he could trace many ice-white resemblances: a steeple, fantastic flowers, a springing cat, the outline of a human head and other curious designs like those made by snowflakes. There was a vivid, slightly red-three quarter moon; the evening wind eerily stirred shawls of Spanish moss which draped the branches of passing trees. Here and there in the mellow dark fireflies signaled one another as though messaging in code. He listened contented and untroubled to the remote singing-saw noise of night insects.”

Sadly, this is likely the last time he will be contented and untroubled until the very end of the story of his first months at The Landing. Joel had left New Orleans with optimism and but arrives with a building sense of dread, confirmed by what he sees and the complete dislocation he experiences. A crumbling mansion, a small group of very strange people living on the outer fringes, no sight of his father, and no indication that anyone is ever going to tell his father's whereabouts. Perpetually drunk, cross-dressing cousin Randolph, Miss Amy his absent-when-present step-mother, Jesus Fever and his daughter Zoo who cook and clean and hold Sunday church service for three, two girls from down the way Florabel and Idabel Thompkins (based on Capote's friend Harper Lee), and Little Sunshine another old black man (and possible lover of Randolph) who lives in the crumbling Cloud Hotel – all these characters swirl around Joel as he becomes more and more lost and lonely, only desiring to be loved and to belong somewhere. Early on there was so much to fear for Joel given the strikes against him in this weird place, where just when you think it can't get any weirder, it becomes completely bizarre (hallucinatory as another GR reviewer called it). But this is truly a coming of age story, of Joel realizing and celebrating who he is. And since this is somewhat autobiographical for Capote, the “who he is” makes complete sense and perhaps he couldn't have discovered himself anywhere else. I finished this slim volume feeling optimistic that Joel had found himself and would be ok.

Robbin says

You know Truman Capote's famous quote about how he felt that he and Perry Smith grew up in the same house, and then one day he got up and walked out through the front door, while Perry left out the back? Also, you know the unnecessary speculation that Capote actually wrote his friend Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*? I really enjoyed this book with its odd, closely observed detail and gothic, Southern, open claustrophobia. Still, it kind of feels like this book and *To Kill a Mockingbird* incubated together, and if Lee's book shows the front door, this eccentricity is probably the back.

Jonathan Ashleigh says

Truman Capote is currently my favorite writer. The poetic fashion in which he brings a novel to life is extraordinary and I hope he can continue to impress me. He introduces his characters in a perfect order, and they are people you want to know more about. The only drawback to this book, his first novel, is that he assumed I understood where he was going at every turn, and I didn't. I wanted a big ending that made we

want to start the book over from the beginning. I didn't get it.

Wyndy says

'In Cold Blood' is my only previous experience with the writing of Truman Capote. I thought that book was superb, so I had high expectations for this first novel of his, published when he was only 23 years old. Initially, I was loving the descriptive prose, but after a while it started feeling overwritten, forced. And this story of young Joel Knox desperately seeking love and acceptance, and the disparity between his expectations of the reunion with his father and the reality of it, and the woe upon woe upon woe, were sad and dark for me. Many of the supporting characters, and the house where Joel is sent to live, are downright creepy. Such is the nature of Southern Goth, I guess - though I'm no expert. There's no question Truman Capote could write, and I plan to read 'The Grass Harp' and 'Breakfast At Tiffany's,' but goodness gracious, this was a strange read.

lori mitchell says

my favorite quotes:

"...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."

"...so few of us learn that love is tenderness, and tenderness is not, as a fair proportion suspect, pity; and still fewer know that happiness in love is not the absolute focusing of all emotion in another: one has always to love a good many things which the beloved must come to symbolize; the true beloveds of this world are in their lover's eyes lilac opening, school bells, a landscape, remembered conversations, friends, a child's Sunday, lost voices, one's favorite suit, autumn and all it's seasons, memory, yes, it being the earth and water of existence, memory."

"the brain may take advice, but not the heart, and love, having no geography, knows no boundaries: weight and sink it deep, no matter, it will rise and find the surface: and why not? any love is natural and beautiful that lies within a person's nature; only hypocrites would hold a man responsible for what he loves, emotional illiterates and those of righteous envy, who, in their agitated concern, mistake so frequently the arrow pointing to heaven for the one that leads to hell."

"What we want most is to be held...and told..that everything (everything is a funny thing, is baby milk and papa's eyes, is roaring logs on a cold morning, is hoot owls and the boy who makes you cry after school, is mama's long hair, is being afraid and twisted faces on the bedroom wall)...is going to be alright."

loved this book. LOOOOVED it.

Andrei Tama? says

Pot afirma cu stupoare (peiorativ), c? Truman Capote nu este unul din autorii moderni care impresioneaz?. Cel pu?in nu prin acest volum. Din punctul meu de vedere, nu-?i merit? faima. Comparând opera lui cu cea a lui William Styron ori -mergând un strop înapoi- cu cea a lui Hemingway, Capote nu este o figura proeminent? a literaturii americane. Repet: nu prin acest roman.
