

TRUMAN CAPOTE: LIFE AS FICTION/FICTION AS LIFE

Thomas LaBorie Burns

Truman Capote was born in New Orleans in 1924. The son of divorced parents, he was sent out from one set of relatives to another in the rural south, an unstable childhood that would be the raw material for much of his work. His education was at northern schools, so it seems that poverty was not one of his vicissitudes, but, in any case, his formal education ended when he was only seventeen. In one of his prefaces he says that he made up stories throughout childhood and decided from a very early age to become a professional writer. Devoting most of his time to his vocation, he claims to have become an accomplished stylist by the time he left school.¹ This precocious dedication may explain the polish of his earliest published work and the professionalism he would maintain throughout his literary career, however erratic his lifestyle.

Capote won the O. Henry prize for short fiction at age twenty-two with the story "Miriam", about an elderly woman living quietly in New York City who meets a strange child with the same name. The little girl mysteriously finds her way to the woman's apartment at night and, though unwelcome, insinuates herself ever more forcefully into the woman's life. The mystery of the origins and purposes of the little girl, the psychological confusion and desperation of the woman, and the mild terror of the ending all suggest the influence of the southern master of the short story, Edgar Allan Poe, and are typical of much of Capote's earlier fictions. Capote writes well about aggressively independent girls or young women, like the

young ghost Miriam, the child wonder-worker Miss Bobbit in "Children on Their Birthdays", the mad painter D.J. from "The Headless Hawk", stories from *Tree of Night* (1949), or the most well-developed example, Holly Golightly, from the short novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), who is willful, spontaneous, goofy, whimsical, and vulnerable, all at once.

Although he doesn't like to be called a southern writer, having lived in so many other places as well,² Capote can be seen to have common ground in that tradition: a penchant for the grotesque and a fascination with violence found in Poe, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers (all, however, undoubtedly superior writers), and an intoxication with extravagant language that southern writers of fiction since Poe, and, in our century, Faulkner, have displayed. Capote has been both praised (by Norman Mailer, who said of one of Capote's short novels that he would not change two words of the whole) and blamed for his language (by Diana Trilling, who said that the prose in one of his major works was "flaccid").³ While his later work shows a more workaday, effective style, avoiding both the muscular, circular style of Faulkner and the flowery, over-written prose of William Styron, Capote's first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), evoked his southern boyhood in rich language that tended to the lyrical, even phantasmagorical.

Capote might usefully be compared to a most unsouthern writer, Norman Mailer, his almost exact contemporary (Mailer was born in 1923), though the two would seem to have little in common. Mailer's macho public pose, his first novel a combat novel of the Second World War, and his continued interest in prize-fighters and confrontation politics form a nice contrast with Capote, whose first novel had an intensely private, even unworldly theme, and whose public personality was that of one who hobnobbed with celebrities and socialites, relished gossip of the rich and famous, and was as well known to the public as lavish party-giver and talk-show guest as best-selling author. And yet, the two writers have important points in common. Both have created a public self, rather notorious in each case, and can in this respect be considered contemporary cultural phenomena quite as much as their published work. This creation of a public personality has served to stimulate interest in their books and so may be seen as a shrewd marketing campaign to keep them in the limelight (the example of Hemingway comes readily to mind), but it also forms an image of two apparently otherwise engaged personalities that belies the reality of their hardworking professional lives. Both men, too, became famous on the publication of first novels

and subsequently had difficulties in getting their later work taken seriously. Both men have written important "nonfiction" works about multiple murderers (Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*) which have expanded our understanding of socio-psychological background of violent criminals and have contributed to a critical debate about the fictionality of nonfiction. Finally, both have centered many of their books on a fictional self in the form of author/narrator/participating character. Ihab Hassan wrote of the "central narcissistic impulse" in Capote's work, but the expression could very well be applied to Mailer as well.⁴

With Capote's first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, the twenty-three year old author achieved a certain notoriety for the book's implicit homosexuality, considered daring at the time, and a photograph of the author — a delicate, dreamy-looking youth — on the dust-jacket. The public was quick to identify this fellow with the over-sensitive young narrator of the novel and the resulting sensation guaranteed that the novel would be a bestseller.⁵ Coming to the novel itself, one finds oneself awash in the dream-laden, hazy world of "Southern Gothic". The young protagonist Joel Knox, having lost his mother and been abandoned by his father at an early age, leaves behind his New Orleans guardians and, apparently summoned by his father, is received into dense, creepy atmosphere of Scully's Landing, an old, decrepit house, once grand and gaily peopled now nearly deserted save its present inhabitants with their history of past violence and sordid family secrets. They are: his step-mother, Miss Amy, and his cousin Randolph, with whom she lives in prickly harmony. Randolph is a Wildean aesthete (who faintly recalls Hawthorne's Clifford), alternately ill or enervated by ennui. The only other person in evidence is Zoo, the black cook, who sports on her long neck an enormous scar inflicted by a former lover, and who awaits the death of her ancient father, Jesus Fever, so that she can go north to a new life. Joel remains puzzled by two questions: his father can't or won't see him now that he is on the premises, and the vision of an apparently mad, white-haired woman in an upstairs window, the existence of whom no one else will acknowledge, a version of the mad-woman-in-the-attic familiar from *Jane Eyre* and the Gothic romances of the early nineteenth century.

Joel is a young dreamer and liar (i.e. creator of fictions) who is frustrated by his inability to get a straight answer to these two questions though it must be admitted that not much suspense is created before they are resolved. The first is answered when he finally is allowed to see his father Ed, a bedridden, uncomprehending invalid,

and he surmises that it was Randolph who wrote the letter summoning him to Scully's Landing. Joel's search for his father is thus settled by its frustration, but his attention switches to two people who have reversed their sexual roles: the effeminate but fascinating Randolph, and a young tomboy named Idabel whom he befriends and confides in and later is repulsed by when he begins to see her as a girl. One day (with no real motivation other than the need to have the story told), Randolph tells Joel the story of his father's accident. Ed had been the manager of a Mexican boxer named Pepe, with whom Randolph and his girlfriend Dolores became involved in a love triangle of the Tennessee Williams type. Randolph accidentally shoots Ed, crippling him. Ed marries Amy, who becomes his permanent nurse, Pepe disappears, and the three live on in the old house, seemingly outside of time, in a complicated relationship of dependency and rejection.

Grotesqueries and implausibility increase, as Joel attempts to run away with Idabel, is pursued by a love-starved female midget, and emerges ill and hallucinatory at home. After his recovery, he makes a journey significantly in the company of Randolph (his attempt with Idabel having failed), to yet another decrepit, once grand house, the Cloud Hotel, in the depths of the woods. They visit a Negro hermit with magical powers, the only inhabitant, and their mule, in a bizarre incident, panics and hangs itself. This journey (and other aspects of the novel as well) has been described as mythic, an example of the archetype of the visit to the underworld, from which Joel returns with ambiguous knowledge: "I am Joel, we are the same people. Idabel has, in the meantime, run off and Zoo has returned from her flight after being gang-raped on the road. The novel ends with Joel looking back "at the boy he had left behind, " the fascination with the double in the novel and in some of Capote's stories being another point he has in common with Poe. Joel is beckoned to by the white-haired madwoman he had once glimpsed, but from Randolph's room, suggesting that the second mystery was simply a matter of an in-family transvestite. Joel's apparent acceptance of Randolph (as a lover?) repelled many readers, but it was, on one hand, a resolution of his original quest for a father (one reading of the novel) and, on the other, an identity of some sort with which to confront the world, so terrifying to someone without one. The finality of Joel's new conception of self also promised, one could add, a resolution to the Bildungsroman this rather preposterous novel had promised to be.

Other Voices, Other Rooms was criticized for failing to maintain the proper distance between the consciousness of author and that of character, a fault that other southern writers like Mark Twain,

Faulkner, and McCullers have overcome with notable success in fictions with naive narrators. A similar criticism was made about the extremely self-contained nature of the story, for nowhere in the novel in fact, in spite of the emphasis on atmosphere, do we find any reference to time or place or to a greater world outside the stifled setting of the story. An attitude widely shared by critics of the time can be seen in the title of one of their chapters on Capote: "The Escape into Otherness".⁶ In her 1973 "Reconsideration" of Capote, novelist Cynthia Ozick saw the book as retreating from rather than providing insight into reality.⁷ Responding to this sort of criticism, Ihab Hassan argued that it is basically irrelevant, since the book is a "novel-romance", in which evil and guilt are defined by the individual rather than a defined social order.⁸ Another critic read the novel as an example of the Grail Quest, so the charge of avoiding reality was answered by the Hawthornian retort that the book should not be judged by the irrelevant standards of realistic fiction. A recent critic of post-war fiction sees the novel as skillfully written but ultimately incoherent, "a book primarily for precocious children... an episodic arrangement of highly wrought passages".⁹ After the linguistic self-containedness of many postmodernist fictions, however, this criticism is perhaps less damaging than it might once have been. For many, coherence is no longer a necessary virtue.

The emphasis on the essential loneliness of human beings and the power of their unconscious fears was an important element in the collection of stories (published the year after his first novel), *Tree of Night* (1949), with the exception of one or two stories, exceptions that were seen as significant in the author's development. Hassan wrote of a "nocturnal" style in which the "curious condition of insight and paralysis" brought on by fear in his early characters, the isolation of self, and the uncanny world of dream, can be set off against a "daylight" style, which features anecdotal, comic, socially oriented stories, such as the exceptions in *Tree of Night*, and the two novels that followed, *The Grass Harp* (1951) and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.¹⁰ Mark Shorer made basically the same dichotomy in Capote's work, though in other terms: the "psychic drama" on one hand, and the "objective social drama, often fanciful" on the other.¹¹ Capote's works in the 1950's tended toward the latter. *The Grass Harp* is a pastoral idyll, where a group of oddly assorted characters withdraw for a brief spell from their small southern town, each with his or her own reason, to a tree-house. Their withdrawal disturbs the conventional folk, led by the sheriff and the minister (law and church), and the ensuing adventures have a mildly comic, elegiac tone. This is

well within the solid American tradition of the Edenic, the vision of innocence that is the main ingredient in both tragedy and comedy in American literature.¹² Between this novel and the next, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Capote spent the intervening years living in Europe, writing travel pieces, working on plays and films. Unsuccessful as a playwright with adaptations of *The Grass Harp* and another work, *House of Flowers*, Capote did rather better with films. As a screenwriter, he has the fine 1954 film, *Beat the Devil* (directed by John Huston), to his credit, and two of his books were also made into movies. The two 1950s novels, while of slight importance, show how well the author could handle contrasting moods, invent unconventional appealing characters, and combine whimsy and fantasy with the realities of social life.

Capote's claim to literary fame lies in his 1960s novel, *In Cold Blood*, based on a multiple murder that occurred in Holcombe, Kansas, in 1959. Two young ex-convicts — Dick Hickock, an attractive yet perverted man, and his grim, stunted, pathetic partner, Perry Smith, who is rather more sympathetic for himself being a victim of a dire upbringing — murder the entire Clutter family: a well-to-do farmer, his mentally disturbed wife, his young son and daughter, agreeable squares from the American heartland. After reading about this crime in the newspapers, Capote went to Kansas, where he claims to have spent six years in research, interviewing family friends and relatives in town, the two killers in jail, and the lawmen involved in their capture. The novel was published in 1966 after appearing in installments in *The New Yorker*. Once again, Capote displayed his talent for controversy and self-promotion. His book got a photo-essay in *Life* and sold well, but the author was criticized both for profiting from the deaths of six people (the four members of the family plus the two executed criminals)¹³ and for spurious claims to literary originality. The first charge has to do more with morality than literature, so I will leave that to the author's conscience and deal only with the second.

The title "In Cold Blood" will turn out to be ambiguous, referring in the first instance to the brutality of the Clutters' deaths, in which an innocent family was bound and gagged and blasted with a shotgun at point-blank range, one by one, but also, ironically, to the legally engineered deaths of Hickock and Smith by the state after the drawn out legal hassles so common in such cases. The bureaucratic cold-bloodedness of capital punishment thus becomes part of the theme of crime punishment. There is a further irony in that while the two criminals killed the Clutters "in cold blood" or with some

apparent premeditation (Dick was fond of saying before the crime, "There's gonna be hair all over them walls") and with no sign of mercy for the victims, the two men seemed to have acted more out of rage at being deceived about some hidden money they had hoped to steal than as the result of a planned murder. They had, in fact, driven to the Clutters' home once out of prison on a tip by a cellmate, who had incorrectly informed them that the farmer kept a home safe full of money. Along with the fortuitous mistake and wholly arbitrary nature of the violence, familiar by now in both fact and fiction, Capote also analyzed in careful detail, in the time-honored mode of naturalism, how the spiritually impoverished lives of Hickock and Smith, quite as American in their way as the Clutters in another, led, inexorably as it were, to their heinous act.

In what he has dubbed the first "nonfiction novel", Capote tries to maintain an objectivity of presentation of the various actors, depicting criminals, victims, and lawmen as human beings in all their contingent complexity, each with his or her private history and concerns. Predictably, in the general feeling of impotence in these violent times, Capote was criticized for sympathizing with the criminals and patronizing the victims, though it seems to me that he sympathizes (albeit not overtly, striving as he is for a journalistic objectivity) with both. If he spends more words on Smith and Hickock, it is because they are, as characters, more interesting (we tend to prefer reading about killers rather than their victims), but he gives the Clutter family their due as decent if dull people who in no way deserved their terrible fate.

One critic has compared the plot of *In Cold Blood* to Thomas Hardy's poem on the fateful meeting of the Titanic with the iceberg that sank it, a comparison that is striking, though perhaps not entirely accurate, since one element in the murder story is not blind but purposeful.¹⁴ "Two seemingly isolated facts will bring destruction and death": the last day of the Clutters' lives and the two killers setting out on their journey, intent on an easy mark. The murder, then, becomes, in the words of another critic, "the focal point of converging narratives".¹⁵ A third vector is introduced after the murder, the police investigation, which falters through the total lack of motive or even any connection of the killers to the victims till finally a tip from the ex-cellmate places the detectives on another narrative line leading to capture, interrogation, and confession. The trial of the two killers, their interminable wait on death-row, and their execution by hanging serve as a kind of epilogue to the story.

I have been deliberately using the terminology of plot, narrative, and so forth, because, despite the author's grandiose claim to originating a literary genre, the "nonfiction novel", I think it is clear that *In Cold Blood* is a work of fiction. What makes it fiction is not the ontological status of the events related in the text, whether or not they really happen, but the author's manipulations of the elements of the story (*histoire*) into a meaningful arrangement, a text (*discours*). In an analogous way, we can say that autobiography is a mode of fiction rather than simply the history of a life, since the author, being an interested party, has every incentive to manipulate facts and invent motives.¹⁶ Even history itself, which is said to be factual, can be regarded as fictional, since any given history is a narrative of a past that is only indirectly experienced through documents and other texts, shaped, interpreted, created by the historian. Any interpretation organizes bits of information; the facts are never just "given". This is true even when they are presented "objectively", an especially insidious form of manipulation since, unlike fiction that calls itself fiction, this kind of narrative is not aware of, or does not admit, its status as shaped narrative, its fictional nature. Capote's novel is not "innocent" in this sense, whatever his claims to fact and objectivity. Of this novel, David Lodge says: "It is written with the novelist's eye for the aesthetic possibilities of his *donnée* for the evocative and symbolic properties of circumstantial detail, for shapeliness and ironic contrast in structure", making it clear that we are not dealing here with assembled facts alone.¹⁷ While Lodge goes on to say that the book "straddles the conventional boundary between fiction and reportage", he has already implied that the boundary has been removed. Despite the catalogues of libraries, fact is fiction.

In addition to the spurious claim of a new genre, Capote, by the journalistic method, by not resorting to the psychological analysis available to the confessed novelist, in the manner of Dostoevsky and others, may have produced, according to Tony Tanner, "the impression of factitiousness rather than fact".¹⁸ And yet, whether the book is faulty in conception or not, there is no denying its power. The 1960's was a decade of both mass-murderers and political assassinations and Capote was historically and sociologically in tune with the times. Killing had become one way to define the texture of American life. "Perhaps for the first time, as Capote was quick to perceive, a society was ready to define itself in terms of its murder, or its ability to murder."¹⁹ He had produced a picture, even if schematic, of the "doubleness in American life",²⁰ that strange combination of violence amid received pieties so familiar to the national culture.

The books that followed *In Cold Blood* added little to the author's stature or notoriety; in general, they mine the childhood memories once more. An exception, and perhaps his most interesting later work, is *Music For Chameleons* (1975), in which we can see why Capote was renowned for another Southern trait, conversation and oral storytelling, though, once again, the apparent naturalness is carefully shaped by the author in writing. The book is divided into three parts, which I will simply describe. In the first, the author-narrator tells about unusual people he has known, and Capote, by all accounts, knew an astounding number of people both famous and infamous. He muses at one point, for example, at the odds against his knowing both Jack and Bobby Kennedy as well as their respective assassins, Oswald (whom he met in Moscow) and Sirhan (whom he visited in jail). In the title sketch, a dignified Creole woman in Martinique plays Mozart, which causes chameleons to assemble in her living-room, a living mosaic of musical lizards. In "Dazzle", he tells how he once stole a gem from his grandmother to give to a New Orleans witch. The story turns on the personal revelation that as a child he wanted to be a girl. In "A Lamp in the Window", he meets, while lost in the country, a kind but "dotty" Old woman who keeps all her former cats, now dead, stacked in the deep freeze as her only companions in loneliness. In the third section, "Conversational Portraits", the sketches feature a core interview which the author fills in with his own comments and background on the people and situation, more examples of his skill at fashioning nonfictional material into stories. Capote's strategy in these vignettes is to reveal things about himself (some of which may themselves be fiction as he was an infamous gossip) while he offers a portrait of his subjects. The possessor of a prodigious memory, Capote claimed he could repeat any conversation up to eight hours long, a gift which helped him in the many long interviews, with no pad or tape-recorder, he conducted in the research for *In Cold Blood*.²¹

In "A Day's Work", Capote follows his 57 year-old black maid, Mary Sanchez, around New York apartments on her cleaning jobs. Mary is given a spiritual lift in her labors by her Catholic faith and, more materially, by a tin of high-grade marijuana roaches she carries in her purse. The two are caught stoned and dancing to Latin music by a pair of outraged, stodgy apartment owners. We learn that Capote's father was a gambler and his mother killed herself with an overdose of Seconal. In "Derring-Do", the author tells of how he was subpoenaed by a California court to reveal confidential conversations he had had with a murderer in prison who was being retried. Protecting

his source and upholding his professional ethics, he disobeys the summons and is liable to arrest unless he can somehow leave the state, which he does with the aid of the superbly self-assured black singer, Pearl Bailey, who smuggles him onto a plane as part of her entourage. In "Then It All Came Down", a sly allusion to *Macbeth* (Banquo's innocent remark on the rain brings down the treacherous knife attack that kills him), the author visits Robert Beausoleil, cheerfully amoral, serving a life-sentence for murder in San Quentin prison. "Bobby" was connected with the Tate-LoBianco murders of Charles Manson's rampaging "family", since the murders presumably removed suspicion from Bobby, in prison at the time, in a rather twisted logic. Bobby's curiously optimistic view of life is "Whatever happens is good", and "Let it all come down". In "A Beautiful Child", Capote attends a funeral with his friend Marilyn Monroe and buys her a bottle of champagne afterwards. Two revelations here: Marilyn uses rather salty language and the author once spent the night with Errol Flynn. Much of this seems to appeal to the talk-show audience, with Capote "tossing off racy anecdotes, and yet again and again he anxiously points out that he's more than a T.V. gremlin... he's a literary figure of Flaubertian rigor and dignity".²² There is, to be sure, throughout Capote's career, this conflict between the serious artist and the public ego that manipulates the media and craves mass recognition. Capote can be said to be obsessed with violent crime and criminals. He said, in an interview, that he had 222 detailed files on American multiple murders, material that would seem to go beyond the research necessary for *In Cold Blood*.²³ Accordingly, he returns to the subject in *Music for Chamaleons*, in the book's second section, its centerpiece, "Handcarved Coffins: A Non-Fiction Account of an American Crime". In fact, it is the author's public reputation as a crime-writer that has furnished the connection between his presence in the story and the investigating detective, Jake Pepper, who had been looking into nine or ten bizarre serial murders for five years and keeping the author informed of his progress. The account (again, despite the subtitle) takes the form of a drama,²⁴ with Pepper, his girlfriend (who turns out to be one of the victims), the chief suspect, and Capote himself taking speaking parts. Here, unlike *In Cold Blood*, where capture was a foregone conclusion, a certain suspense is built up as to the next victim and the outcome of the cat-and-mouse game the killer plays, so that this "compact pulp thriller" (Capote, at one point, even plays chess with the suspected killer) is written as a "death-watch chronicle".²⁵

The killer would send to his victims little coffins, beautifully handcarved from balsa wood, with their photograph inside, before he murdered them. The first two victims were a couple who were attacked by drug-crazed rattle-snakes placed in their car; the second was beheaded by a sharpened steel wire strung at exactly the right height as he rode by in his wagon. Pepper becomes convinced that the crimes are the work of one Bob Quin, an ex-war hero and wealthy rancher, over a water dispute. All the members of the committee that had pronounced on the dispute (unfavorably to Quin) were sent coffins, and all but one met violent deaths. The legal evidence against Quin is, however, weak and circumstantial. Pepper, obsessed with Quin's guilt, becomes involved in a strange relationship with the suspect, is assumed by his superiors to be overwrought, and is eventually removed from the case. This superb story, ready-made for a horror or suspense thriller (it was, in fact, sold to the movies), is denied closure, however, as the killer is never brought to justice. While acknowledging the cinematic, thriller quality of the story, James Wolcott criticized it for a reason similar to the criticisms of Capote's crime novel, namely, that it "never explores the depths of murderous passion". Though larded with ominous description and telling detail, these stylistic "embellishments are never more than decorative".²⁶

What one can finally say about the art of Truman Capote is that, while it possesses sharp observation, technical though not innovative skill, and emotional power, it lacks depth. As we have seen, his finest work, *In Cold Blood*, refused to go as deep as it might have done, and all his work holds to a glittering surface, which accords with the large public recognition the author so avidly sought and gained. When his promised final book, *Answered Prayers*, was partially published in *Esquire*, there was yet another scandal,²⁷ as the author revealed the sordid data of the upper-class social milieu (for example, that Joseph Kennedy, Sr. raped a 16 year-old girl). Capote argued, after these excerpts came out and caused the predictable outrage, that gossip is the germ of all art, citing Proust as an example.²⁸ That it is the germ may well be true, at least of a certain kind of social chronicle, but it does not follow that gossip itself, entertaining as it is, is art, for the germ must blossom, may be pruned by the artist, if it is to become more than mere gossip.

Notes

- 1 Preface to *Music For Chameleons* (New York: Signet, 1975), p. xii.
- 2 Cander, Marjorie Dent, ed. *Current Biography Yearbook, 1951* (New York: 1951), p. 92.
- 3 Goad, Craig M. "Truman Capote", in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. II, "American Novelists Since World War II", ed. by Jeffrey Helterman and Richard Layman (Detroit: Buccoli Clark, 1978), p. 85.
- 4 Hassan, Ihab. *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1961), p. 235.
- 5 Goad, "Truman Capote", p. 83.
- 6 Aldrich, John, in *After the Lost Generation* (New York: McGrawHill, 1951).
- 7 Ozick, Cynthia. "Reconsideration —Truman Capote", *The New Republic*, January 27, 1973, pp. 31-34.
- 8 Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 244.
- 9 Karl, Frederick, R. *American Fictions 1940-1980* (New York: Harper Row, 1983). pp. 16-34.
- 10 Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, pp. 231-2.
- 11 Schorer, Mark. "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns", *The Critical Present*, eds., Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons (Doubleday, 1963), pp. 88-107.
- 12 Karl, *American Fictions*, p. 42.
- 13 Goad, "Truman Capote", p. 85.
- 14 Karl, *American Fictions*, p. 578.
- 15 Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-70* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 345.
- 16 Karl (p. 579) thinks the book is not a "non-fiction novel" but "non-fiction, with authorial intrusion", an example of the "new journalism". The book does have authorial intrusion, as we might expect in a fictional work, but has little do with the works of the New Journalists like Hunter Thompson or Tom Wolfe, and strives, with whatever success, toward something of "higher" significance and more permanent value than even the more serious journalist pieces.
- 17 Lodge, David. "The Novelist at the Crossroads", reprinted in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1977), pp. 90-1.
- 18 Tanner, *City of Words*, p. 346.
- 19 Karl, *American Fictions*, p. 578.
- 20 Tanner, *City of Words*, p. 345.
- 21 Ruas, Charles. *Conversations with American Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1985 p. 52.
- 22 Wolcott, James. "Tiny Coffins", review of *Music for Chameleons*, *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 25, 1980, p. 44.

- 23 Ruas, *Conversations*, p. 55.
- 24 James Wolcott (op, cit., p. 44) says it is in the form of a screenplay, which is perhaps more accurate, since the author furnishes descriptions that might serve as instructions to the cameraman.
- 25 Wolcott, "Tiny Coffins", p. 45.
- 26 Wolcott, "Tiny Coffins", p. 45.
- 27 Ruas, *Conversations*, p. 38, 50.
- 28 Wolcott, "Tiny Coffins", p. 46.