

Ed, thanks for the Capote (by Norden) from Gallery 3/73. I suppose it is necessary to try to keep up with the gyrations of the uninformed and ignorant as they become important to themselves in pontifications about what they are incapable of understanding. The guresome thing is this, after Cold Blood, is his attack on others for writing about a consequential crime as he is incapable of doing. We made money, which is very bad, but he became a millionaire, and that makes whatever he did very good. He didn't invent the concept. This sickness inherent is not beyond their understanding. It is hidden by their self-concepts. Besides, how can the Capotes work when they have all those larges sums of money to waste on parties that do no good. This is a man who exaggerated his decency in flaunting himself in a suggestive pose on the cover of his book. There is something evil and hideous in all this and these kind of parasites. And now you know the secret of success in this best of possible worlds. HW 3/12/73

LOYALIST } COLLEGE

OF APPLIED ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Dear Harold,

Note the phrase
"guns - - - White House" is
a usual for usual repetition
of The Garrison/home emissaries
status.

The other unblemishing
neglects all too well

The Kennedy Position.

Asked if he believed

"The W.R., Powers replied,
Of your best friend is
dead, what difference
does it make if one
man as a humiliated
billed him.

To over 59,000
Americans the "difference"
was life.

But Capote knows
this crowd.

Sincerely,

3/73
GALLERY

with one another. But it's really a very disparate group. You have brilliant and enlightened businessmen like Bill Paley, artists like Noel Coward and Cole Porter, intellectuals like Henry Kissinger. The group transcends political and ideological and national differences.

GALLERY: A kind of international elite?

CAPOTE: Yes, I suppose so, but an elite of merit, not birth or social position.

GALLERY: It still sounds rather snobbish.

CAPOTE: Well, I *am* a snob, but not the kind you mean. In any society, you'll always have an elite of the talented and creative, whether they're recognized or not. I'm not an egalitarian in that sense; no greater lie was ever uttered than the line in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. They should, of course, all have equal opportunity, and it has nothing to do with class or race; I've known black Alabama sharecroppers who have more intelligence and wisdom in their little finger than the entire British aristocracy. But intelligence is a profoundly unequal endowment, and despite the good intentions of the founding fathers there remains an unbridgeable gulf between the Jeffersons and Paines and the Jukes and Kallikaks. So to the extent that I believe in a natural aristocracy of the gifted, I suppose I am a snob. But it has nothing to do with money; I could live equally well in a furnished room in Cincinnati or in a Venetian palazzo; what I could *not* stand is the mediocrity of the middle-class suburban split-level with the two-car garage and the barbecued souls. That would be hell. And that's why I choose my friends on the basis of intelligence and sensitivity, not money or titles.

GALLERY: For many years now you've numbered the Kennedy family among those friends. What do you think has accounted for this mutual affinity?

CAPOTE: Well, I can only answer for myself. I've always liked and respected the Kennedys I've known, and admired their wide range of interests and talents. I didn't really know the President that well, but I came into closer contact with Bob and Jackie and her sister, Lee. Robert Kennedy was a neighbor of mine here in New York, and we'd see each other often. The last time was just about a week before his death; it was seven in the morning—he was always a very early riser—and we were both walking our dogs. He was just off for the final leg of the California campaign, and he was very optimistic about victory. He was obviously exhausted, but he still had that tremendous vitality of all the Kennedys. And then a week later, after he'd won the primary, I was awakened by a call from a friend at about three in

the morning. "Have you heard the news?" she asked, and then told me Bobby had been shot and it looked very bad. I sat through the night by the radio, still finding it hard to believe. I was supposed to be on the funeral train from New York to Washington, but I was too ill to go. A friend of mine, someone extremely close to him, said later: "It was such a hot day. Sweltering. And there was the grave waiting in the grass under this great cool green tree. And suddenly I envied him. Envied him all that green peacefulness. I thought: Bless you, Bobby, you don't have to fight anymore. You're safe."

GALLERY: Was Bobby's assassination a hard personal blow for you?

CAPOTE: It was for me, and it was for the country. You just have to look around you to see that.

GALLERY: Do you believe Ted Kennedy is aiming for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1976?

CAPOTE: I have no idea. If he really does want the nomination, of course, I don't see anyone around in the Democratic party who could stop him. Muskie and Humphrey are yesterday's newspaper, McGovern is dead as a door-nail, Jackson's constituency is too narrow, and poor George Wallace is not only unacceptable to the party's liberals but just in too bad shape to ever make a serious race. I know many of Ted's family would prefer him not to run because of the sheer physical risk, but Bobby faced the same threat of assassination and decided to go ahead anyway; he was quite aware there were guns between him and the White House but he wouldn't allow that to influence him, and Teddy would probably feel the same if he really wanted to run and thought he had a good chance. It would be an ugly campaign of course; an issue like Chappaquiddick dies hard in the public imagination, and a lot of people would be working hard to keep it alive and virulent.

GALLERY: Do you see much of Jackie Kennedy?

CAPOTE: We run into each other fairly often.

GALLERY: Has she ever expressed any bitterness about the rapid change in public opinion after her marriage to Onassis?

CAPOTE: No. It's true of course that there is this whole love-hate affair between the American people and all the Kennedys, not only Jackie. You saw it with Ted right after Chappaquiddick, when his hordes of sycophants turned into Madame Defarges overnight. And much the same thing happened to Jackie after she married Onassis. Of course, people hate to see their myths shattered. The popular consciousness had created an image of Jackie as a

kind of eternal virginal widow-mother, maybe a surrogate repository for all their grief and guilt over the assassination, and then suddenly she reveals she's a flesh-and-blood woman after all. But that kind of misplaced sentimentality is understandable enough, and I don't think it bothers her very much. The public has always been fickle towards its darlings, but ole Jackie will survive.

GALLERY: Has she appeared happy since her marriage to Onassis?

CAPOTE: I don't think she's ever been happy; as long as I've known her she's been by nature a melancholy person.

GALLERY: Even before Dallas?

CAPOTE: Yes, but that certainly didn't help!

GALLERY: Many critics of the Warren Report have argued that Lee Harvey Oswald could not have been the lone assassin, contending there was a well-organized conspiracy to kill the President. Did you ever hear any of the Kennedys speculate about this?

CAPOTE: No, they would never raise the subject. Understandably enough. Their attitude was, and is, that John and Bobby are dead and nothing can bring them back. All this paranoid conspiracy theorizing is just bullshit as far as I'm concerned. Of course, it's also an easy way for a lot of human vultures to make a quick buck.

GALLERY: And yet after the Martin Luther King murder you advanced a "Manchurian Candidate" theory of assassination, speculating that so-called "loners" like Oswald and Ray could actually be manipulated behind the scenes by unknown puppet masters.

CAPOTE: Well, that's precisely what it was, speculation. I was suggesting that men like Oswald or Ray or Sirhan or Bremer are sociopaths filled with such random violence and resentment that they become like loaded guns, and it's not impossible that they could be cocked and aimed and fired by more rational and sinister forces. That does remain an abstract possibility and I felt at the time it was worth discussing, but so far I've seen no evidence to bear it out. I think what you really have here is what I would call The Tyranny of the Nobody. Men like Oswald are ciphers, empty vessels, who can only assume an identity of their own by robbing someone else of his identity. And what better target than the Kennedys, rich, charismatic, powerful, and glamorous—everything these nonentities are not and could never be. So they shoot them down with a cheap mail-order rifle or a "Saturday Night Special" pistol and instantly they achieve the identity of their victim—and immortality as well. It's a kind of vampirism, actually, both psychic and physical; like the witch doctor

eating the heart of his enemy, they steal their victim's soul and absorb his strength and character. You can see the whole syndrome most clearly and most revoltingly in the case of that nauseating old woman Marguerite Oswald, who became an instant newspaper and talk show celebrity after the assassination; not only does her son steal the identity of Jack Kennedy, but she then goes on to steal the identity of her son! The whole spectacle was disgusting. Thank God the mothers of Bremer and Ray and Sirhan at least keep their mouths shut. I spoke to Sirhan just the other day, in fact, while I was in San Quentin doing a television documentary.

GALLERY: Did he talk about the assassination of Robert Kennedy?

CAPOTE: No, but then he really never has, even to his lawyers, except to say that he can't remember what happened at the time. That may or may not be true, by the way, but it's not entirely impossible; people acting under such violent claustrophobic compulsions sometimes do burn out their conscious memory of the actual act of violence. I've seen it in other less celebrated murderers I've met in recent years. But Sirhan was mainly concerned about his solitary confinement in the isolation ward at San Quentin; he's totally and permanently separated from all the other prisoners and he's grown very uneasy and dissatisfied. But I can see the Warden's point, because if Sirhan was let out into the yard he probably wouldn't last a day; if he wasn't killed by somebody who admired Bobby, he'd be knocked off by one of his own kind, another instant celebrity-seeker. So at least this way he has a chance of staying alive. There are a tremendous number of in-prison murders, you know; in San Quentin alone, where I've spent a lot of time, there's an average of two a week. In fact, while I was there I saw one prisoner murdered just a few feet away from me. One inmate attacked another from behind and drove a screwdriver through the back of his neck with such force that the point protruded an inch through the front of his throat. The blood squirted out like a firehose, and he was dead when he hit the ground. And that kind of thing is a common occurrence. The guards just took the killer away, swabbed down the floor, and then everything returned to normal. So even with the end of capital punishment our prison population is being thinned, from within.

GALLERY: In the past few years you've interviewed hundreds of murderers in death rows across the country and conducted several network television shows on the question of prison reform. Why does the subject interest you so

CAPOTE: It actually dates back a long way. When I was a child of nine or ten I lived in rural Alabama near the Atmore Prison Farm, and every day I would watch the chain gangs working along the road. I'll always remember the total, dehumanizing brutality of the guards, and the kind of drowned stare of the prisoners. It made me angry at the time, and it still does. But until I started work on *In Cold Blood* in 1959 I'd never had any other firsthand experience with crime or criminals or the penal system. I worked on that book, I *lived* that book, for five and a half years; I studied that particular crime and those particular criminals, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, for as long as it takes a student to qualify as a doctor or lawyer. And in the process I not only came to know Smith and Hickock very well, but I inter-



I'll never forget that day; it was the worst in my life. I can still see Perry saying goodbye, looking very young, strapped into a leather harness. He was shaking, his entire body, but he smiled, and then they led him up the steps to the scaffold. A few minutes later he was dead, dangling from the end of a rope.

viewed a couple of dozen other convicted murderers as part of my research. I still really haven't recovered from that whole experience and probably never will, but I came out of it with a deep interest in prisoners and prison reform, one which I keep coming back to in the midst of all my other work.

GALLERY: You've been quoted as saying that Hickock and Smith "Became very good friends of mine—perhaps the closest friends I've ever had in my life." What could you find in common with two mass murderers?

CAPOTE: I don't think having things in common had anything to do with it at all. But once I'd won their confidence

and they'd agreed to cooperate with me, I would see them over and over again in the four years between their conviction and execution, sweating out the last months and weeks and days with them on Death Row. Dick Hickock and I never became too close, really, but I did develop a genuine friendship with Perry Smith. He was a hopeless psychopath and would have killed again if he'd ever been released, but he was also an oddly sensitive and intelligent boy. I was the only one in the world who wrote to him or talked to him or displayed any interest at all in him, and he responded with gratitude and affection. On my part, I never romanticized him, as so many people mistakenly did over Carryl Chessman—a genuinely cunning and brutal psychopath, incidentally, not the gentle martyr the tender-minded thought—but I related to him with a sympathy and understanding that eventually did grow into genuine friendship. In the last few months, particularly, we grew very close.

GALLERY: Why did you attend the execution of Hickock and Smith?

CAPOTE: Perry asked me to. I'll never forget that day; it was the worst in my life. I can still see Perry saying goodbye, looking very young, strapped into a leather harness. He was shaking, his entire body, but he smiled, and then they led him up the steps to the scaffold. A few minutes later he was dead, dangling from the end of a rope. We knew, both of us, that it was inevitable, but recognizing that intellectually and accepting the reality of death are two different things. And the whole execution was so unreal, somehow; everyone looked *embarrassed*.

GALLERY: British author and critic Kenneth Tynan has alleged that you cynically exploited the friendship of Hickock and Smith for your own journalistic ends. According to Tynan, you never lifted a finger to help the two men in their legal appeals because you actively desired their deaths as a fitting dramatic finale to the book. How would you answer his charges?

CAPOTE: I'm very glad to have the opportunity. First of all, allow me to say with my customary impartiality and objectivity that, in my opinion, Kenneth Tynan is a lying little bastard, a talentless hack riddled with envy and resentment for his betters, and a totally duplicitous and hypocritical coward. Having gotten that straight, let's go into this thing in more depth. First of all, Tynan's charges that I didn't help Perry and Dick have been rebutted by everyone involved, including Joseph Jenkins, their lawyer, who wrote a lengthy rebuttal to Tynan in the pages of the *London Observer* attacking his total ignorance of the American legal system