

Deconstructing the Binary of Good and Evil: An Exploration of *In Cold Blood* and *Columbine*

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the representation of the good and evil binary through the analysis of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Dave Cullen's *Columbine*. The texts recount true murders in the history of the U.S.: the murders of 4 Clutter family members by Dick Hickock and Perry Smith in 1959 in Holcomb, Kansas and the school shooting massacre at Columbine High School by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in 1999 in Littleton, Colorado. These narratives open with the cities in which these murders occur juxtaposed with descriptions of the killers. In the event of the murders these two seemingly opposite entities merge, the beginning of the deconstruction of the good and evil binary. The deep exploration into each of the killers' character, lives and sexuality furthers the deconstruction of the binary by establishing one man as sympathetic and the other as an embodiment of true evil. This stance taken by the authors is supportive of a spectrum of good and evil, rather than a strict binary. Through this perspective, the texts pose difficult questions for society amounting to: how do we treat different manifestations of evil, especially those that result from the experience of early tragedy? If we continue to robotically characterize men as either good or evil at the expense of true understanding, we risk losing what makes us human: empathy.

I: Introduction

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Dave Cullen's *Columbine* provide accounts of brutal murder performed by a pair of men. The former documents Dick Hickock and Perry Smith's 1959 murder in Holcomb, Kansas of four members of the Clutter family. *Columbine* investigates the 1999 school shooting in Littleton, Colorado at Columbine High School. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed twelve students and one teacher before killing themselves. These texts are particularly of interest considering the stereotypical murderer in American culture is that of the lone killer. Therefore, the murders committed by these men raise peculiar and perplexing questions about motivation, identity, and ethical categories. Murder, particularly when committed by a team of men, is hard to understand and hence these murders invite complex literary treatment, even though at first the crimes may appear to be utterly black and white.

Both texts open in dramatic fashion: a picturesque description of two towns that will soon be penetrated by the forces of evil. By doing so Capote and Cullen immediately establish the presence of a binary in the novel, good and evil, appealing to a conventional and simple sense of morality. The authors do so in the beginning of their narratives in order to later deconstruct the binary and complicate normative beliefs of morality and justice. The involved, dynamic, and at times sympathetic characterization of the murderous male pairs destabilizes the binary of good and evil that Capote and Cullen first establish. This characterization, therefore, suggest a realistic view of good and evil, that of a spectrum, rather than a stable binary. Capote and Cullen, through the involvement of the text with the murderers, their histories, and their motivations, render the binary of good and evil outdated and primal.

The murderous men in these novels operate outside of society's norms, representing the abnormal, both in their evil acts and in their sexual natures. These novels posit a question about

what makes the norm the norm. Who defines good and evil? Who says what is right and what is wrong? While the bare facts of each case seem to present a set of morally unambiguous events (the pairs of men are without a doubt guilty of murder), these novelistic investigations can explore questions of motive and, unlike law, do not have to supply a definite verdict regarding guilt or innocence. These novels portray the problem in understanding the world and people as simple artifacts of good or evil and offer an alternative mode of thinking: that an event or person may in fact be a composite. These novels, while operating in the literary realm, have significant consequences for the real world, posing philosophical questions of good, evil, morality, values, and justice that threaten to undermine the current standards of the American middle class and the justice system.

II: Establishing the Binary of Good and Evil

Capote and Cullen introduce and characterize the murders as an intrusion of a foreign force, that of evil, into an innocent and fundamentally normal setting. Both books progress in a fashion that eventually disrupts this initial image of perfectly normal cities and reveals a distinct difference between the aura of the cities before and after the murders. Capote and Cullen set up such pleasant representations of Holcomb and Littleton in the beginning of their novels in order to show the disruption the murders cause. In other words, the authors emphasize the calm of the cities in the beginning of their narrative in order to make their fall from normalcy even greater. In a way, the narratives reflect a fall from grace story, a sort of secular and historical echo of the story of the Garden of Eden, especially considering the strong presence of religion in both Holcomb and Littleton.

Capote begins *In Cold Blood* with vivid imagery of Holcomb, Kansas portraying the town as full of normal, everyday, likeable people. Capote writes, “The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them” (3). The above quote exemplifies Capote’s attempt to establish Holcomb as starkly contrasted with the evil that will infiltrate its environs on an early Sunday morning in November of 1959. His choice of diction like “awesomely,” and “gracefully,” elevates Holcomb over a typical farming-town. He then goes on to describe the grain elevators as “Greek temples,” attributing the town with a majestic quality that no doubt is exaggerated by Capote in order to further distinguish this small farming town from the horrible murders that happen within its city limits. The religious undertones of this quote are particularly important in solidifying Holcomb’s profound difference from Hickock and Smith, men of evil, men of Satan. By equating Holcomb with images of cities of gods, Holcomb itself becomes holy and therefore pure and innocent. This represents the exact opposite of the event that is to occur in Holcomb, the murders of four innocent, god-loving American people. In his essay on *In Cold Blood*, Kenneth Tynan supports the idea that Capote exaggerates the grandiose qualities of Holcomb. He writes, “Capote’s vision of Kansas is over-sentimental” (Tynan 130). Tynan’s choice to use the word “sentimental” to describe “Capote’s vision,” perfectly exemplifies Capote’s blatant exaggeration of the greatness of Holcomb and connotes that Capote describes a past version of Holcomb, a version that no longer exists. Tynan, therefore, suggests that the sentimental Kansas Capote describes in the beginning of his novel has been altered, dramatically affected by the murders of the Clutters.

The people of Holcomb, as Capote explains, are “quite content to exist inside ordinary life—to work, to hunt, to watch television, to attend school socials, choir practice, meeting of the

4-H club” (5). By describing events and daily activities commonly known and practiced by everyday people, like “work” and “school socials,” Capote establishes the normalcy of the population of Holcomb. A character in the novel merely traveling through Holcomb describes the amiable character of the city. The traveler claims, ““Look all over the world, and you won’t find friendlier people or fresher air or sweeter drinking water”” (33). This traveler describes Holcomb as a place that deserves rank with the most adored cities across the globe further begging the question, how could something so terrible happen in a place so righteous? This question is exactly what Capote hopes will surface after marinating the opening of his narrative with descriptions of a friendly and venerated town.

Capote’s description of the Clutter farm furthers his representation of the city as faultless by portraying the victims of the murders as exemplary, hard-working Americans. Zooming in on the location of the murders, the Clutter farm, Capote gives this pristine description: “Situated at the end of a long, lanelike driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms, the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass, impressed Holcomb; it was a place people pointed out” (9). Within the first chapter of *In Cold Blood*, Capote proves he is a master of creating a mental image. The details of “Chinese elms” and “Bermuda grass,” give the image breath. Suddenly the house is not just a fictional structure created in the text, but rather a real-life house full of a loving family. The “handsome white” color continues Capote’s creation of an image but also typifies the Clutter family as innocent, representing purity, cleanliness and moral superiority. The color, perhaps also hints at the racial purity of Clutters, especially when considering the emphasis Capote places on Perry’s mixed race. This is further supported by the fact that the Clutter’s house “impressed Holcomb.” The farm is awe-inspiring and so too, therefore, is the family that lives inside it.

The description of the Clutter household can be projected on the Clutter family itself. From the description of the house, it is safe to assume that the Clutter family that lives inside is also pristine and respectable and a family most people in Holcomb find impressive. This becomes even more obvious with Capote's constant favorable description of the Clutter family throughout the rest of the novel as the ideal American family, a representation of the American dream.

The first chapter of *In Cold Blood* resembles a collision of two opposing forces, that of good, the Clutters, and evil, the murderers. Tynan argues "what took place in Holcomb was a nightmare collision of two incompatible Americas: the land of the heart loving, God-fearing families and the land of vengeful, anarchic outcasts" (130). Capote emphasizes this "collision of two incompatible Americas" by revealing both the victims of the murders and the murderers in the very beginning of the novel, in the very same chapter.

Columbine opens on a similar note to *In Cold Blood*, focusing on Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the place where the school massacre occurred in 1999. The first chapter, titled "Mr. D," reconstructs the assembly just before prom weekend, the weekend before the Tuesday of the school shootings. The scene starts with what one would typically imagine at a school assembly full with "pom-pom routines, the academic awards, and the student-made videos" (Cullen 3). Then the principal Frank DeAngelis (Mr. D) gives a heartbreaking speech, complete with tears, begging his students to be safe over the weekend, to make smart choices, and to return to school the following Monday. The scene finishes with two thousand high school students chanting "COL-um-BINE," creating a tone of passion and unity (4). The image of high school students roaring with pride over their high school and their principal overcome with fear because of the dangers they face the upcoming weekend presents an image of Utopia, of

profound compassion and greatness among the community. By giving this touching reconstruction, Cullen establishes the idea of a school shooting happening in the confines of this high school, of this united community, not just improbable, but rather unfathomable.

In the very next chapter, Cullen describes the high school, establishing its practicality and beauty in order to ultimately contrast it to the manifestation of evil that will take over the compound¹ on April 20, 1999. He writes, “Columbine High School sits on a softly rolling meadow at the edge of a sprawling park, in the shadow of the Rocky mountains... It’s practical, like the people of south Jefferson County” (11). The imagery of a “rolling meadow” exudes a sense of tranquility and beauty, of a community unscathed by crime and danger. He then describes the practicality of the school, attributing this aspect of the school to the overall practicality of the people of Littleton. Furthermore, this practicality, like Capote’s description of the people of Holcomb, establishes the normalcy of the people of Littleton. Earlier in the chapter, Cullen describes the suburban structure of the city: “On fat winding lanes and cul-de-sacs, comfortably spaced two-story houses pop up among the pines. Strip malls and soccer fields and churches, churches, churches” (11). This description not only establishes the people of Littleton as ordinary, everyday citizens content, like the people of Holcomb, to live the typical American life but also emphasizes the deep religiosity underlying the community. The repetition of “churches” at the end of description places a heavy emphasis on this aspect of the community. The focus on religion places the people of Littleton on a pedestal in society, as the Western world prioritizes those of faith. More importantly, religion is starkly contrasted with what is considered evil, like murder. Therefore it is even more uprooting when such a religious

¹ Columbine High School was built to be able to quickly transform into a factory, in case the population of Littleton failed to continue its quick growth pattern.

community experiences a tragedy that receives international attention as the worst school shooting in U.S. history.

After both authors establish the overall pleasantries of Holcomb and Littleton, they immediately interject foreshadowing of the murders. In his essay on the journalistic nature of *In Cold Blood* William Wiegand describes the effective technique of a quick interjection as “cross-cutting,” a medium journalists use to introduce two ends of a story, leading to the point where the two seemingly unrelated threads unite (139). He explains the “cross-cutting” technique of Capote’s opening that integrates both descriptions of the setting and immediately transitions to scenes of Perry and Dick, the two men who brutally murder the Clutter family. George Garrett’s analysis of *In Cold Blood* further supports Wiegand’s assertion of the cross-cutting nature of *In Cold Blood* by reviewing the beginning structure of the novel (“Then and Now”). Garrett believes the beginning of the novel intentionally establishes a dramatic difference between the killers and the Clutter family. Garrett explains, “The first three sections move along quickly and easily, intercutting back and forth between the murderers and their unsuspecting victims, then the hunters and the hunted” (469). This cross-cutting works to establish a series of interlocking binaries: settled Clutters, rootless drifters; rural Clutters, urban killers; familial and communal Clutters, isolated killers. These binaries flesh out the larger binary between good and evil. In the beginning, the Clutters are presented as “unsuspecting,” having no forewarning of the men en route to rob their house on the evening of November 15, 1959. Yet, Garrett describes them as “the hunters and the hunted,” suggesting a dependent relationship between the Clutters and the murderers, and yet another binary. This description, therefore, connotes an upcoming meeting, or perhaps collision, of the two.

Wiegand argues the technique of cross-cutting establishes the stories of the Clutters and the murderers as “two forces before they collide” (139). George Garrett quotes Capote in an interview on the topic of *In Cold Blood* to confirm the idea of collision as a central theme in the novel. Garrett writes “Capote quoted in an interview ‘desperate, savage, violent America in collision with sane, safe, insular even smug America—people who have every chance against people who have none’” (468). In this quote, Capote clearly views the story of the Clutter murders as a collision of two very different versions of the world. He describes the murders and Perry and Dick as “desperate and savage” alienating them from the otherwise normal boundaries of society. These savages ultimately collide with the “sane” and the “safe,” an example of two opposites, the good and the evil, meeting for the first time and causing horrific destruction. This collision is represented in the first chapter of *In Cold Blood* and *Columbine* when both Capote and Cullen give quick details of the murders that soon befall the towns of Holcomb and Littleton.

After portraying Holcomb as a quiet, simple town, Capote succinctly transitions to the forecast of the upcoming murders. Capote’s opening integrates both descriptions of the setting and immediately transitions to images of the murders, exemplifying Wiegand’s “cross-cutting”. It furthers Capote’s attempt for dramatic effect by presenting two oppositions in the very first chapter of his novel. Capote writes, “But then, in the earliest hours of that morning in November... certain foreign sounds impinged on the normal nightly Holcomb noises...four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended six human lives” (5). The very insert of these few lines into the chapter describing the city of Holcomb is an impingement in itself. These foreboding lines starkly contrast with the otherwise pleasant preceding content of the chapter. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines ‘impinge’ as “to strike; to come into forcible contact with, collide with” (OED). Collide connotes forces that oppose one another and in this case, Capote insinuates

the forces that collide in this novel are the classic forces of good and evil, an idea supported by Garrett and Capote himself. By giving his readers the description of “foreign sounds” in the night, Capote prepares his reader for the upcoming collision.

Paralleling *In Cold Blood*'s structure, in the very same chapter of *Columbine* that Cullen so artistically describes the high school assembly, Cullen immediately transitions to a foreboding paragraph about the impending murders. The short but effective paragraph sharply contrasts with the description of the affectionate assembly Mr. D gave only a few days before the shooting. Cullen writes, “On Tuesday, April 20, 1999, twenty-four of Mr. D's kids and faculty members would be loaded into ambulances and rushed to hospitals. Thirteen bodies would remain in the building and two more on the grounds” (5). By describing the victims of the shootings as belonging to Mr. D, Cullen makes the already tragic loss seem even more salient, as if the Columbine community is more like a family mourning the loss of thirteen of its members. The implication of Cullen combining these two very opposing scenes within the same chapter illuminates his intention to fit the town of Littleton and the school shooting into the binary of good and evil, respectively, representing a collision, like the collision prefigured in *In Cold Blood*, of two opposing forces.

Structuralism has taught us that our cultural categories, including the categories of ethical understanding, are constituted relationally (Klages). Structuralism understands categories synchronically, but there is nothing fixed and frozen about good and evil, as Capote and Cullen make clear. Structuralism argues that even in the instance when good collides with evil, they remain pure, undefiled by one another's presence. If this were true, then throughout *In Cold Blood* and *Columbine* we would see a continuous pattern of scrupulous descriptions of Holcomb and Littleton and demonic characterizations of the murderers. This, however, is not the case.

Capote and Cullen establish the binary of good and evil in the first chapter in order to later break it down. By breaking down these binaries, the authors question society's definition of good and evil. These texts reveal society's hypocrisy of its judgments and force it to rethink definitions of good and evil and ultimately ask how to handle instances of evil.

The questioning of society's judgment of evil is particularly evident in the *pornoviolent* nature, a term coined by Tom Wolfe, and the unquestionable success of the novels. Wolfe defines "pornoviolence" in his essay on modern media as the new age pornography, with violence taking the place of sex as the arousing feature. Tom Wolfe explores how novels like *In Cold Blood* and *Columbine* recognize a fascination with violence by society. On *In Cold Blood*, Wolfe writes:

Hair on the walls is the invisible subtitle of Truman Capote's book *In Cold Blood*. . . . The book's suspense is based largely on a totally new idea in detective stories: the promise of gory details, and the withholding of them until the end. . . . You are led up to the moment before the crime on page 60—yet the specifics, what happened, the gory details, are kept out of sight, in grisly danger, until page 244 (185-6).

What Wolfe emphasizes through this quote is the curious nature of society to know the details of horrific acts. It represents a certain hypocrisy in society to judge harshly the terrible acts done by others but also desiring to know each and every detail. It's the reason people follow ambulances, why traffic accumulates when there has been a car accident. There is a certain fascination with death, with evil. Wolfe claims this is evident by the perspective taken in such novels that explore gory crimes. He writes, "What makes it pornoviolence is that in almost every case the camera angle, therefore the viewer, is with the gun, the fist, the rock. . . . You live with the aggressor, whoever he may be. One moment you are the hero. The next you are the villain" (184). Are people not similar to the monster they so claim to hate? The authors recognize this hypocrisy and utilize it in a way that keeps interest, and creates a suspense that renders the reader incapable of putting the book down. Capote and Cullen keep their readers captivated by relaying

the gruesome details of the crimes late into the story. Furthermore, this inability to stop reading poses a question: why is it that one cannot keep from reading of such terrible acts of evil? Could it be that all people are composites of both good and evil? Is it not so easy to define people as either good or evil but rather requires more detailed attention? Through these narratives, the binary of good and evil is an adequate representation of neither the world we live in nor the people who inhabit it. Capote and Cullen strive to portray a more realistic version of the world, one that does not define events and people in terms of white and black but rather pays attention to detail, realizing that the world cannot be partitioned into neat halves but is rather a chaotic mess.

III: Deconstruction of the Good and Evil Binary

The authors begin to deconstruct the binary of good and evil by disseminating the exemplary nature of the Holcomb and Littleton that they established in the very first chapter of their narratives. As the books progress, the cities of Holcomb and Littleton begin to fall apart—the people begin to turn on one another.

As *In Cold Blood* progresses, Capote inserts hints of a deeply affected town, a town different from the original version first introduced in the beginning of the novel. In such a small town, it is hardly surprising that the people of Holcomb became suspicious of their peers. Capote offers several descriptions of suspicion among the people of Holcomb, revealing the impact of the murders on the town. The people of Holcomb believed that the murderer would turn out to be one of their own, a killer lurking behind the scenes of the quiet town. Capote describes a rapid change in the town: the “peaceful congregation of neighbors and old friends had suddenly to endure the unique experience of distrusting each other; understandably, they believed that the murderer was among themselves” (88). Capote emphasizes the “sudden” nature of this growing

suspicion as the murders of the Clutter family had an immediate negative impact on the entire community of Holcomb. He also describes this suspicion as a “unique experience,” as the people of Holcomb had never endured such a tragedy and had no former guidelines to make the process of grieving easy.

Grief and suspicion at large, the people of Holcomb lived in fear for months following the murders. The townspeople went from practically never thinking to lock the door before they turned to sleep, to hardly sleeping at all with every light lit and every pair of eyes open. Capote describes what travelers witnessed as they passed through Holcomb in the wee hours of the morning: “windows ablaze, almost every window in almost every house, and, in the brightly lit rooms, fully clothed people, even entire families, who had sat the whole night wide awake, watchful, listening” (88). The idea of travelers seeing “brightly lit rooms” with “entire families... wide awake” is extremely eerie. One cannot help when reading that sentence to find themselves a little uneasy. What would a traveler think of a town wide-awake at a time when most are asleep? It would hardly seem normal, and the town would hardly seem at peace—a considerable shift from the Holcomb described at the onset of the novel.

Wiegand argues Perry and Dick’s prolonged prison stay in Kansas represents a significant shift from their previous nomadic lifestyle and is symbolic of the permanent mark they leave on Holcomb (141). Perry and Dick’s presence within Holcomb represents a merging of what Capote first introduced as good and evil. The binaries Capote establishes at the beginning of the novel are increasingly unsettled.

A similar shift develops in *Columbine* as fear consumes the people of Littleton and causes significant unease, destroying its once simple nature. Initially, the community came together offering support to those who had lost loved ones in the shooting. Later, however, the

consequences of the shooting shook Littleton like a mammoth earthquake. A year after the shootings a slew of lawsuits filed against the school and the Littleton police force tore the community apart. The families of the victims wanted payment for medical bills or loss of lives, and some felt they deserved more than others. It was an ugly battle that turned many families against each other and caused others to agree with whispers already circling around regarding “the continued whining” of the families of the victims (Cullen 300).

A chapter in *Columbine* titled “Aftershocks,” describes at exhaustive lengths the rumors and further horrific events occurring near the six-month anniversary of the shooting. The day of the six-month anniversary “450 kids called in sick,” signifying an ever-present distrust and fear lingering in the city of Littleton (282). Two days later, a mother of one of the shooting victims shot herself in a local Pawn shop, unable to handle her daughter’s injuries, the tension of the anniversary, and her own debilitating depression.

The anniversary brought a serious threat against the school as well. A boy “intended to fill his car with gasoline canisters and plow into the school as a suicide bomber” (284). With the onset of the New Year, Columbine High lost four more students: one found by a Dumpster near Columbine, two others murdered, and one committed suicide. With the string of tragic events, it seems that evil has left an enduring mark on the city and people of Littleton.

No one in Littleton knew whom to blame for these perpetual sequences of tragedy. A new phrase developed in the town, the “Columbine Curse,” insinuating the sheer lack of control the community felt in the wake of unrelenting, continuous bad news (289). Sheriff Stone offered an ugly option, placing blame on the parents of Harris and Klebold. In a press conference he was quoted, ““It’s their parenting thing, not our fault for their kid doing this thing’” (285). Many took sides with Stone, a rather understandable perspective of grieving families hopeless in their search

for meaning behind the shooting. Once beloved by his parish, Reverend Marxhausen was fired for the compassion he showed the Klebold family when they came to him in desperation. One local pastor asked what many also wondered: “‘When will it end... Why us? What is happening in our community’” (288)?

These descriptions show just how volatile the cities of Holcomb and Littleton became after the murders. The once peaceful cities became places riddled with grief, suspicion and fear. It is clear, then, that not only did these murders, these occurrences of evil, infiltrate a once ‘good’ environment, but also forever alter the cities and their inhabitants. This inverts the pattern of the detective story in which the solution to the mystery restores integrity to the community that has been disrupted by the crime. Perhaps these crimes, though solved, leave something unknown in their wake, unlike the fictional crimes in detective novels. The visible changes in the cities suggest that in the event of a collision of opposing forces, the forces fail to remain undefiled by one another, like structuralism theorizes. Rather, it seems as though these forces exchange pieces of themselves in the collision. It is like a single drop of black paint finding its way into a pool of white paint. All it takes is that single drop to pigment the white color, to darken it, to turn the white into a muddled grey.

IV: The Spectrum of Good and Evil as Illuminated by the Murderous Pairs

The murderers, Perry and Dick and Eric and Dylan, are, like binaries, a pair. Pairs of men, men that are particularly different, performed both of these tragic slayings. In each pair, one seems to fit the archetypal figure of evil. The other man, by contrast, awakens the reader’s sympathy. In *Columbine* Cullen describes the tendencies of murderous pairs, informed by Agent Fuselier, an expert in the area: “Mass murderers tended to work alone, but when they did pair

up, they rarely chose their mirror image. Fuselier knew he was much more likely to find a pair of opposites held up in that building. It was possible there was no single why—and much more likely that he would unravel one motive for Eric, another for Dylan” (72). Cullen here uses the term “mirror image” to connote replication, an exact copy of another. This is somewhat confusing considering a mirror image is exact but also inverted. Regardless, Cullen contrasts this replication with an “opposite.” Fuselier claims when murderers work together, they tend to work with their opposite. In this way, the men can be seen as a binary, opposing one another, one of the men being what the other is not.

Both Capote and Cullen support the idea of the pair representing a binary through their constant contrasting depictions of the murderers. The authors specifically recall areas where the men differ and call them to attention. Both authors may simply be elucidating what criminologists have known for years. They “have been aware of the dyad phenomenon for decades.... We know that partnerships tend to be asymmetrical. An angry, erratic depressive and a sadistic psychopath make a combustible pair” (244). Indeed both partnerships, Eric/Dylan and Dick/Perry, are unsettling asymmetrical, with Eric and Dick representing the “sadistic psychopath” and Dylan and Perry assuming the role of the “erratic depressive”. The following section delves deep into each man’s life and illuminates the opposite nature of each pair.

The portrayal of Dick and Perry in Capote’s writing exposes one man as the main puppeteer, the other as his puppet. Dick plans and organizes the Clutter household robbery that leads to the murder of 4 members of the Clutter family. Perry plays the role of follower and disciple. In 1966, Garrett illuminated the dichotomy between Perry and Dick as the classic rivalry of villain versus hero. He argues, “There is an explicit archetypal malevolence about Dick...Perry has all the right characteristics: a rich and childish imagination... his physical

deformity, his sensitivity, even his background... heaping the burden of evil on the head of Hickock” (“Crime and Punishment” 7-8). Because Capote characterizes Dick as an “archetype” of evil and aligns Perry with fictionalized hero’s from his other novels², the sympathy falls to Perry while the animosity strongly falls upon the shoulders of Dick. This is an astounding artistic feat considering Perry’s primary role in the murders. Dick repeatedly claimed and demanded they would not leave witnesses: ‘I promise you, honey, we’ll blast hair all over them walls’” (22). However, when it came to the moment to eliminate the witnesses, Dick’s “courage” fails him. Perry on the other hand, went into the household without the intention of harming anyone. However, when Capote finally divulges the details of the actual killings, the reader learns that Perry commits each one; most by a shot to the head at point blank range with a sawed-off shotgun, and killing Mr. Clutter by slitting his throat.

How is it then that, by the end of the novel, we sympathize with Perry rather than Dick? This is where Capote’s influence and bias are clearly evident. Perry is more sympathetic because Capote represents him as a vulnerable and malleable man on account of a traumatizing and loveless childhood.

The story of Perry’s childhood is not only more interesting than that of Dick’s, but receives significantly more attention throughout *In Cold Blood*. While Capote displays Dick’s childhood as relatively healthy with loving and supportive parents, Capote’s close attention to Perry’s home life creates a vehicle that enables an understanding of Perry as a tragic figure and offers an explanation as to why he committed these murders. After learning Dick and Perry’s motive behind the Clutter family murders, a mere robbery, one can only be left wondering why? Why would these men murder four innocent human beings for the 35\$ in the Clutter home?

² Garrett claims all of Capote’s heroes are “cheerful narcissists”: he quotes a scene of Perry looking in the mirror to confirm Perry’s narcissism

Capote offers a simple answer: Dick is pure evil while Perry needed someone to answer for the tragedies he suffered in childhood. Trenton Hickman, in his essay on the characterization in *In Cold Blood*, claims “Capote offers eight pages³ of psychological exegesis that blame Perry’s problems on the events and environment of his early years” (471). This suggests a strong impact on those who are less evil when placed in negative environments, while suggesting that even positive environments have little effect on those who are pure evil, a notion Dick represents.

Capote offers the readers an answer as to why these men committed this crime. For Perry, Capote offers an alternative to the initial damnation mentality, that he is evil. Rather, Capote places blame on the parents who mistreated Perry and the world that seemed incapable of offering him anything but tragedies. Capote quotes a letter written by Perry explaining key moments in his childhood. As a young child, Perry witnessed his father beating his mother. Perry writes, “When he came home a fight ensued, and my father...proceeded to beat my mother.... I felt she must have done something dreadfully wrong” (Capote 275). The latter part of this quote functions to immediately establish Perry as unable to understand his surroundings, the reasons for the continuous misfortunes in his life. The fact that Perry believed his mom to be guilty of doing “something dreadfully wrong,” suggests an inability to understand why someone would choose to cause harm to an undeserving subject. By including this quote from Perry’s letter, Capote confirms that Perry in fact could not understand evil as a child ultimately saying that Perry was not born with these pathologies, but rather developed them throughout the course of his life.

After establishing Perry as perhaps an innocent child at birth, Capote then includes a segment revealing Perry’s later childhood in which he largely had no parenting, no role model,

³ Perry’s handwritten account of his childhood included in the book on pages 296-302

no caregiver: “I had started to run around with a gang, all of which were older than myself. My mother was always drunk, never in a fit condition to properly provide and care for us. I ran as free and wild as a coyote. There was no rule or discipline, or anyone to show me right from wrong. I came and went as I pleased” (275). This lack of provision led Perry to have “no rule” and no one to “show [him] right from wrong.” How then, can anyone reasonably expect Perry to know right from wrong as an adult, if the basics were not taught in young childhood? The remark by Perry mingles an idyllic image of childhood as a kind of closeness to nature, and manages to suggest that ideas of right and wrong are not innate, but learned—a perspective Capote seems to support.

Capote suggests through the portrayal of Perry’s childhood that the reason for Perry’s evil tendencies lies in the fact that he never learned the difference between right and wrong and therefore renders Perry incapable of claiming responsibility for his wrongdoings. In his essay regarding the concept of evil, Terry Eagleton suggests that “children, after all, are only semi-socialised creatures who can be expected to behave pretty savagely from time to time. If Freud is to be credited, they have a weaker superego or moral sense than their elders” (1-2). Eagleton argues savagery among children should not be surprising but rather expected. He references the “weaker superego,” the moral compass coined by Freud, as a developmental reason for savagery. Perry can be read as frozen in childhood with a weak superego as a result of the trauma he experienced at a young age. Dick, on the other hand, learned these values from a steady home and yet, deliberately plans and enacts criminal offenses. After Perry describes his mom as not only an alcoholic but also a mother that did not “properly provide and care for” her children, he establishes himself as a victim of child neglect. Little exposure to authority and discipline explains Perry’s jail time and an inability to follow law in adulthood. Ultimately this quote

renders Perry incapable of properly functioning in an adult world governed by morals and law. Perry's description of being a "coyote," therefore seems very appropriate, as he, like a coyote, is a wild animal, never domesticated by the civilized culture that operates inside the boundaries of normative society.

Perry's pitiful story continues with his constant enrolment in detention centers as a juvenile delinquent. During his stay at these centers, Capote portrays him as a victim of brutality rather than a being of pure evil. Perry describes an abusive nun at one particular detention center: "She thought it was very funny to put some kind of ointment on my penis. This was almost unbearable. It burned something terrible" (Capote 275). This horrific image solidifies Perry's childhood as absolutely tragic, suffering not only from domestic violence, child neglect, loss of both parents, but also from sexual abuse. Including this bit of information into Perry's childhood works especially well to contrast Perry from Dick. While Perry was the victim of sexual abuse, Dick takes on the role of abuser, molesting prepubescent girls. This will be explored in the sexuality section of this thesis.

Capote includes these intimate disturbing details into Perry's childhood in order to give the foundation for an argument that ultimately relieves Perry of any responsibility in his own evil tendencies: that Perry's environment cultivated a damaged young man incapable of resilience under constant torment. Knowing the details of Perry's childhood, not only allows for sympathy on behalf of Perry, but also makes the following quote by Perry explaining why he murdered the Clutter family not only possible but absolutely believable: "I don't know why... I was sore at Dick... But it wasn't Dick. Or the fear of being identified... And it wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it'" (290). In this confession of Perry's, it

is clear he himself must work through exactly why he killed the Clutters. The issue of confession complicates the idea of pure environmental influence of Perry's evil tendencies as a confession connotes guilt and although Perry experienced a difficult childhood, not all people who experience tragedy young turn into killers. Therefore, Perry's confession recognizes the contribution of his tough childhood to his criminal ways but also forces him to realize his poor resilience. He starts by not really knowing why he would perform such an atrocious act, and ends with the only explanation that he can truly understand. Evidently, Perry lacks a primal desire for murder. Rather, it seems as if the tireless years of tragedy and loss of love seemed to take a harsh toll on Perry's well-being and conscience. Perry argues that someone who experiences such a terrible life can only be expected to lash out at some point in time. He needed someone to pay for all the dreadful things that happened to him. Unfortunately, the Clutters were those people. However, one must wonder if Perry ever would have snapped without the presence of Dick. Like Dylan from *Columbine*, Perry may not have ever been guilty of murder, although surely of other petty crimes) if not for the demands of his counterpart Dick. Perry's confession ultimately distills him as both a victim, a victim of a relentlessly harsh environment, and a perpetrator, the man that killed four innocent people. In this way, Perry not only aligns with Dick as one half of the pair that committed the Clutter murders but also with the innocent Clutters themselves.

Contrastingly, Dick grew up in a steady household able to teach him morality and the difference between right and wrong. Dick writes the following in a letter explaining his childhood: "My home life was also normal... I can only remember my mother and dad having one argument that amounted to anything... I had a lot of toys when I was little" (278). Overall, Dick's description portrays a very quaint and calm childhood, free of tragedy and despair. Dick goes on to explain his marriage to a Baptist girl and the work he acquired, a job that was honest

but paid little. At this point in his life Dick's crime streak begins: "During my employment there was the beginning of some of the lowest things I have ever done" (278). It's clear that Dick is leading up to the beginning of his criminal actions but interestingly Capote interjects. Instead of hearing from Dick's voice the manifestations of his unlawful lifestyle, Capote jumps to a segment in Dick's letter that portrays Dick's pedophilic tendencies. This omission of Dick's side of the story inhibits any defense of Dick's being considered. Rather, Dick conveys as a man innately capable of evil, with very little pushing him to become a con man and rapist.

Capote furthermore harbors resentment towards Dick by illuminating Dick's parents as unaware of their child's innate evil and as victims of Dick's cunning and manipulation. Before and after the Clutter family murder, Dick and Perry visit with Dick's parents. Capote's choice to reenact these visits along with including the baffled interviews of Dick's parents after receiving the news of their son's monstrous actions makes it seem as if Dick took advantage of his parents, knowing full well they'd support him through an investigation if he and Perry were ever caught.

At one point, Dick finally reveals his motivation for going to the Clutter house, besides the belief in a safe filled with cash. He divulges, "'Before I ever went to their house I knew there would be a girl there. I think the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl'" (278). Dick says that even "before [he] went to their house" he had fantasies of raping Nancy Clutter. This helps to establish Dick as predator, a premeditated attacker. Thinking like this before the adrenaline rush of actually committing a crime, suggests that Dick has an inherent evil inside him that is only calmed by his own cowardice. This premeditation of rape starkly contrasts with Perry's "in-the-moment" killings of the Clutter family. Perry's actions are far from coherent, as exemplified by his protection of Nancy from Dick's sexual cravings only minutes before he murders her. Perry's incoherent actions are significant because they strongly differ

from the premeditated actions of Dick. Aforementioned, Perry admits that he had no intention of harming anyone when he walked into that house, signifying a lack of inherent desire to harm others. Clearly, with Dick, this is not the case.

What is especially astounding is Capote's ability to convincingly rank Dick's fantasies of rape as worse than Perry's actual murders of the Clutter family. In the house of the Clutters, Perry prevents Dick from raping Nancy Clutter before killing her. A sense of relief arises as Dick leaves Nancy alone. Why is this? How is it that relief follows even though her death is surely on the horizon? Much of the description of the Clutter murder is through the eyes of Perry. Because this moment appears through the perspective of Perry he appears to be the hero of Nancy's purity while Dick manifests as a monster. Hickman claims "*In Cold Blood* permits Perry to narrate his version of the encounter, incriminating Dick and portraying himself as a person of some moral compunction" (471). The omission of Dick's point of view during the murders, according to Hickman, forces the reader to depend on this account alone and to receive it as truth, rendering Perry in some way a man of morality. If Dick's narrative were included, a possibility for doubt arises leading to possible differences between the two men's accounts. Perhaps Perry actually went into the house planning on killing the Clutter family. Perhaps it was actually Dick who gave Mr. Clutter a mattress to sit on and tucked Nancy in before their murders. Perhaps Dick decided not to rape Nancy on his account, if he did in fact attempt to rape her. The omission of Dick's account of the narrative relieves him of an opportunity to defend his character or to corroborate Perry's version. Perhaps Capote chose to leave it out because he knew Dick would defend his character, even if it meant lying. Even though Capote tells us about the inconsistencies between Perry and Dick's stories, the reader is forced to believe Perry's accounts

in an effort to avoid recognizing the impossibility of knowing all the facts and therefore ultimately fails to question the validity of Perry's perspective.

When reading Perry's recount of why he killed the Clutter family, it takes tremendous effort to not feel a profound sense of sadness. However, when reading of Dick's desire to rape Nancy Clutter the presence of pity for Dick is non-existent and is replaced with disgust. Is this the appropriate response? Premeditated crimes are seen as more severe under the ideals of American law. The fact that the victim often lives in one scenario while the other dies seems to rank murder as ultimately worse than rape. Furthermore, Dick doesn't actually rape Nancy (Capote tells us that Perry stopped this from happening, continuing to contribute to Perry's sympathetic characterization) but Perry kills four people. This conundrum seems only to support the conclusion that Capote's different portrayals of Perry and Dick are manipulated and created by Capote's authorship in an effort to establish Perry as a victim and Dick as a merciless predator.

What does the sympathetic portrayal of one man and damning characterization of the other mean in terms of how evil is defined? There is no question that murdering the innocent is an evil act. Therefore, are not the men that perform these acts an instance of evil themselves? But how is it that one man can be "more" evil than another, especially when considering the theory of binaries. If in fact, Perry and Dick were extremely similar then it would be easy to categorize both men as evil, representing the exact opposite of good, and therefore supporting the conviction behind structuralism. The sympathetic and evil characterization of Perry and Dick respectively while both participated in a truly evil act complicates defining "evil," and therefore also complicates the binary of good/evil. Perry and Dick support an idea of a spectrum of evil rather than a concrete, well-defined concept of evil. The portrayal of this pair deconstructs the

binary of good and evil and rather argues that perhaps good and evil lie at opposite sides of a spectrum and that in between is a grey area, allowing people and objects to be part good and part evil, simultaneously. This idea is similarly supported by Cullen's representation of Eric and Dylan.

Cullen delves deep into Eric and Dylan's character, personality traits, and tendencies to reveal these discrepancies between the pair of men. Of Eric, he writes, "Eric had a preposterously grand superiority complex, a revulsion for authority, and an excruciating need for control" (Cullen 234). Throughout *Columbine*, Cullen presents abundant evidence to portray Eric's "superiority complex". According to Cullen, Eric left a startling number of clues to teachers and counselors of his plans to bring the school of Columbine to fiery destruction. He wrote immensely detailed papers on the Nazi Holocaust and a short story portraying a gruesome murder. He had fooled a probation officer into approving his release from a juvenile rehabilitation program after she had believed he had reformed. The counselor gave him top rate marks and claimed he had tremendous potential.

Cullen uses this trickery as a way to represent Eric's "revulsion for authority," as he constantly disproves any idea of a person having any sort of authority over him. By tricking those whom were considered his authorities, he undermined them, taking advantage of their naïveté.

Finally, Cullen describes Eric as having a "need for control." This explains Eric's meticulous premeditated planning of the shooting at Columbine high school. His journals depict countless drawings of the arsenal they would acquire, the outfits they would wear, and their strategic positions outside the school including where and when they would shoot. Together, these traits Cullen works painstakingly to establish as unquestionable form the classic identity of

a psychopath, defined by “a ruthless disregard for others.... an astonishing gift for disguising that very disregard...and a poverty of emotional range”⁴ (240). To describe Eric as a “psychopath” tends just to give a new term for “evil”. Eagleton describes western societies belief regarding the concept of evil: “Evil is unintelligible...The word has come to mean, among other things, ‘without a cause’” (Eagleton 2-3). A psychopath represents a person unfathomable to those with emotions, a person completely incomprehensible to the majority of society. Eric, therefore, is unintelligible and his evil actions seem to be, like manifestations of evil, without a cause. The belief in the unintelligible nature of evil renders grasping the reason behind Eric’s intangible. Eric’s actions are deemed as resulting from his evil character, his psychosis, allowing society to quickly pass judgment rather than ruminating over “why?”

Eric’s lack of emotion starkly contrasts with Dylan, Eric’s partner and a chronic depressive. Cullen draws a clear contrast between Eric and Dylan. In fact, the one emotion that seemingly overwhelmed Dylan’s life was that of love. Cullen writes, “Love. It had been prominent from the first page of [Dylan’s] journal, but now, a year in, it grew overwhelming. He emblazoned entire pages with ten-inch hearts, surrounded by choirs of smaller, fluttering hearts” (216). When thinking of a merciless killer, nonetheless a teenage boy, one hardly thinks of a young boy doodling figurine hearts in a notebook. The quintessential killer is much more like Eric, someone full of hate. Cullen writes, “Eric had no use for love. Sex, maybe. He shared none of Dylan’s desires for truth, beauty, or ethereal love. Eric’s only internal struggle concerned which stupid bastard was more deserving of his wrath” (216). Cullen establishes Dylan as man of love and Eric as a man of hate, beings of total opposites. While Dylan concerns himself with deep issues like “truth, beauty” and love, Eric has a much shallower purpose, only existing to

⁴ Cullen defines psychopath from the book *The Mask of Sanity* by Dr. Hervey Cleckley

express rage. Just in these last two quotes, a painting of opposites emerges. While Dylan is consumed with love, hate alone fuels Eric. While Dylan is lost in deep thoughts and fantasies, Eric seems content to exist in the shallow end, living in a wretched reality with “stupid bastard[s].” While Dylan drowns in overwhelming emotions of depression, Eric’s emotions are minimal, if not non-existent. With quotes like these, Cullen clearly establishes Dylan as Eric’s opposite, a boy capable of passionate love, unlike his cold domineering counterpart.

Furthermore, Dylan was quiet, always playing a back seat role. This starkly contrasts with Cullen’s description of Eric as a being with an intense “need for control.” Cullen presents Dylan as the perfect accomplice. He writes, “Dylan always saw himself as inferior. The anger and the loathing traveled inward” (127). These descriptions together create a disturbing feeling of sympathy. While Cullen portrays Eric as the cold-hearted killer through his narrow focus on Eric’s psychopathic tendencies, he renders Dylan a heartbreaking character, forcing a sense of sympathy and undoubtedly summoning an uncomfortable feeling in the reader. How is it that both men participated in the mass shooting at Columbine high school but for one we are capable of sympathy?

The differing motivations behind each boy’s desire to kill may explain the surprising sympathy one has for Dylan. Agent Fuselier in *Columbine* expected completely differing motivations from Eric and Dylan. Cullen confirms Agent Fuselier’s suspicions. He writes, “Eric craved self-determination. Dylan just wanted a way out. Alone, he might well have been talked down. He had been promising suicide for two years and never brought himself near it. He never had a partner to guide him out” (351). Cullen’s use of “craved” to describe Eric’s ambition is his way of solidifying Eric’s character. The word connotes a strong, uncontrollable, innate desire creating assurance that Eric is, in fact, a manifestation of pure evil. In the very next sentence,

Cullen uses a much weaker and simpler word, “wanted,” to describe Dylan’s desire for suicide, as a “way out,” suggesting Dylan lived in an unbearable environment that needed escaping. This works to simplify Dylan as a sad and disturbed teenager, not a cold-blooded killer like Eric. Furthermore, Cullen emphasizes the fact that Dylan needs a “guide,” rather than being able to guide himself through the act of suicide. Cullen writes, “Dylan Klebold was not a man of action. He was conscripted by a boy who was” (188). This emphasizes Dylan’s weakness and position as an inferior to the overpowering, domineering Eric, who “craved” the self-determination that Dylan so helplessly lacks. These five sentences alone establish the pair of Eric and Dylan as a binary, composed of two men who differ on the essential levels that brought them to murder.

The function of the pairs of murderers is to deconstruct the binary of good and evil. Capote and Cullen portray one man as the archetypal evil figure and represent the other as overtly sympathetic. Yet, these men all represent some form of evil as they all participate in murder, the ultimate offense in western society. Therefore, we cannot define these men as exact opposites from good, as Dick and Perry, and Eric and Dylan, are not equal forms of evil. Dylan and Perry have aspects of good and evil, impossibility in the structure of the binary. So, how then do we define good and evil? Mary Klages, professor of Literary Theory at the University of Colorado, writes, “When this happens, you can no longer define one term as the opposite of another – light is what is not dark – but when light and dark are no longer opposites, than what do the terms mean” (60)? This is exactly what *In Cold Blood* and *Columbine* ask. They argue, through the representation of the pair of murderers, that good and evil cannot be defined in terms of opposite but rather takes detailed investigation and focus on every personal account of evil.

Some critics felt uncomfortable with the humanization of the murderers. Critic Diana Trilling claims Capote represents the killers “too sympathetically”. However, is Dick really

represented sympathetically? Through out *In Cold Blood* the reader is presented with information that confirms Dick's role as the executer of the robbery act, an unappreciative child, and ultimately a terrible friend to Perry, the man Dick convinces to rob a house instead of visiting his one friend in life that he had met in prison. The only sympathetic moment for Dick comes when Capote relives a terrible car accident he suffered as a teenager. However, Capote's physical description of Dick suggests that although the car accident changed Dick physically, the accident cannot be faulted for his soiled character: "The left eye being truly serpentine, with a venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature" (31). Capote claims that although Dick's physical deformity was "involuntarily acquired," it ultimately warns of the evil residing in his soul. Furthermore, Dick's parents' tendency to blame the accident for all of Dick's faults quickly trumps any sympathy for Dick as suddenly he is seen as taking the victim role, using his accident as an excuse for his crimes. Dick's parents actually function in the novel to push Dick farther away from any sort of sympathies. Capote quotes Mrs. Hickock on Mr. Hickock's health to exemplify the effects of Dick's selfish actions. From the shock of his son's terrible actions, Mr. Hickock is "dying. I don't think he minds any more" (Capote 288). The revelation of his son's true character literally sickens Mr. Hickock, another consequence and life ruined by Dick's selfish actions.

Perry, on the other hand, as mentioned before, portrays as an extremely pitiable character. He is a man suffering from the torments of his childhood; an easy and vulnerable target to the sleek and charming ways of the dominating Dick. Trilling's comment, therefore, seems not to apply to Dick while it may be appropriate for Perry. Capote's representation of Dick seems cold, as if Dick is responsible for the murders, although he himself did not kill a single Clutter. Capote

does, however, represent Perry “too sympathetically,” as Trilling claims. While Capote’s diction ceases to use overt sympathetic words towards Perry, this does not mean Capote didn’t choose to include information that generally supports a more sympathetic portrayal of Perry. On the surface, it may seem that Capote is merely presenting the facts. However, the information presented functions to alienate Dick from the reader while simultaneously bringing Perry to the forefront, available for pity. Therefore, one man perhaps is represented too sympathetically, as Trilling suggests, while the other suffers from a blatant lack of sympathy in his portrayal. Garrett writes, “One, Dick Hickock, is from the outset the most blameworthy and the least attractive, basically a bad influence on the other, Perry Smith, who is presented with deeply dimensional sympathy” (“Then and Now” 471). Therefore, perhaps the value of the book does not lie in Capote choosing to support either the Clutter family or the murderers, but rather prevails in Capote’s choice to support one murderer over the other.

This is contrasted with Trilling’s argument that Capote’s novel ultimately is categorized as nonpartisan, arguing that Capote fails to satisfy the reader by avoiding picking a side (122). Trilling argues that Capote’s partisan stance in writing *In Cold Blood* decreases its literary value and leaves readers wishing Capote had either taken side with the killers or delved deeper into the seemingly innocent Kansas farmers.

Yet, Trilling criticizes Capote for portraying the killers “too sympathetically.” Perhaps Trilling mentions this critique as an example of Capote’s effort to be bipartisan, since the readers would already have a negative view of the murderers. Therefore by portraying the killers as sympathetic, Capote places the Clutter family and the killers on the same sympathetic level. What Trilling fails to address is the discrepancy of text devoted to the Clutters versus the murderers. Although Capote tends to write from a removed stance, as if he removed his personal

opinion from the story, the very fact that Capote delves into the killers' history to such an exhaustive extent renders his novel partisan on behalf of the killers. By providing details into the killer's lives, Capote instills a sense of sympathy, a generous treatment of the killers. Capote's willingness to retell the stories of the killers' lives while hardly giving comparable text to the story of the innocent Clutter victims suggests a desire to sway the reader to partisanship on behalf of the killers.

Garrett, in contrast to Trilling, believes *In Cold Blood* belongs to the killers, a book for the benefit of the killers, rather than the victims. He writes, "That it is, finally, [the murderers] book, their story, is underscored by the epigraph, four lines asking for pity and God's mercy, from Francois Villon's "Ballade des pendus"" (469). The four lines from the poem "Ballade des pendus", or the "Ballad of the Hanged Man", Garrett refers to, according to Robert Fitzgerald's translation, are:

Men and brothers, who after us shall be,
Let not your hearts too hard against us grow,
For if on us poor men you take pity,
God will be merciful to you also (177).

This ballad, through the eyes of a man facing imminent death, begs those who watch his death to have pity on him so that when those men too face death, they will be greeted with mercy. By including this stanza of the poem that mentions, too, the death of the onlookers, Capote questions the actions taken by those who chose to execute the murderers for their deeds, an inverse of what many think should actually be the question of *In Cold Blood*: how could these men commit such heinous crimes? During the trial against Perry and Dick, Perry says, "I'll be damned if I'm the only killer in the courtroom" (Capote 289). This supports the idea that Capote's novel turns normal thought on its head. Rather than asking how these men are capable of such murder, rather ask how supposedly civilized people, can elect to execute two men.

Capote's fascination with this question expands to an essay he wrote for Esquire Magazine in October of 1968 titled "Death Row, U.S.A". Capote's essay featured seven inmates on death row expressing their personal beliefs regarding capital punishment. Most of the inmates believe capital punishment "just ain't right" and that "an execution is 'still killing' and doesn't 'help society'" (Gale 63). One man on death row supported execution only because it offered a way out of his "misery" (63). In the same essay Capote interviewed three supporters of capital punishment. According to San Quentin's chief surgeon, Dr. Leo L. Stanley, "witnessing over 150 executions has drained him of 'nerve and life'" (64). Stanley describes how witnessing deaths has made him emotionless and empty. Is this not the evil society so fears? Does this description not parallel with the description of Eric's psychopathic tendencies? If by killing psychopaths society only creates more emotionless human beings, is the punishment effective?

By including these proponents of capital punishment, Capote may appear partisan but the supporters he quotes throughout the essay point out some downfall of the punishment that further the arguments of the opposition. Professor of social-philosophy at New York University Dr. Ernest Van Den Haag's testimony is particularly interesting as he supports the punishment but offers a caveat. Haag "dislikes seeing murderers 'survive,' maybe less so regarding participants in 'non-premeditated' killings" (64). Haag's caveat relates directly to Perry: should he be hung even though his killings were unplanned? Are the jurors worse than Perry as their decision plans Perry's execution in advance whereas Perry killed in the heat of the moment? Capote argues for the need of a review board in the court system that includes a psychologist and claims it "would probably never release a horrible killer such as Perry Smith, who, however, would not be told he was in for life and would therefore retain some hope" (65).

In her essay on structuralism and violence, Elizabeth Grosz quotes Derrida as he poses the same question: ““What difference is there between, on the one hand, the force that can be just or in any case deemed legitimate, not only as an instrument in the service of law but the practice and even the realization... and on the other hand the violence that one always deem unjust”” (139)? Perry brings this to light by referring to the members of the jury as “killer[s]” themselves. Capote, through Perry, therefore begs a provocative thought: are they, the members of the jury, any different than Perry and Dick? Derrida poses a similar question: ““Where can we draw the dividing line between legitimized or justified force and the forces that are either prior to, excessive of, or not obedient to law, legitimation, right, or the proper”” (139). How is the violence that the jurors elect to take against Perry and Dick any different than the violence Dick and Perry thrust upon the Clutter family? Where is this “line” that justifies executing a man for murder? How is this line defined? Largely, it is defined by society, and Capote questions society’s judgment. According to Garrett, Capote’s work has a “clear and consistent moral frame, an inversion of conventional, middle-class values” (“Then and Now” 470). The inverse Capote argues for here is that perhaps the civilized are no different than the monsters, if death remains the end result. Garrett also writes that in multitudes of Capote’s work, “It is the outsiders and the outcasts who reject conventional morality and are examples of another kind of virtue” (470). Perry specifically represents “another kind of virtue,” as Capote regards him with incredible sympathy throughout the novel. After all it is ultimately Perry who perceives the hypocrisy in the system: death for death. By quoting the four haunting lines of Villon’s Ballad at the beginning of the novel, Capote establishes the function of *In Cold Blood*: to garner the pity and sympathies for the men whose path to execution is documented by its pages, questioning the judgments of the normative American middle class.

Diana Trilling also believes *In Cold Blood* ultimately asks its audience to deliberate on how to handle psychopathic killers in the justice system by providing an in-depth history of both the killers' lives. Garrett supports Trilling's argument here, claiming that Capote ultimately argues, "unless we do something... about all that's 'desperate, savage, violent' we are going to suffer the consequences and they will be very bad" ("Crime and Punishment" 11). The ending of the novel reveals Capote's opinion that perhaps, depending of the nature of killer, there are differing solutions. During Dick's execution, Capote claims the witnesses felt little emotion or loss for his life. However, when Perry meets his final moments of life, Sheriff Avlin Dewey expresses a sense of sadness:

The preceding execution [of Dick] had not disturbed him, he had never had much use for Hickock, who seemed to him "a small-time chiseler who got out of his depth, empty and worthless." But Smith, though he was the true murderer, aroused another response, for Perry possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded, that the detective could not disregard (Capote 340-41).

If the man perhaps most closely acquainted with the two murderers, other than Capote himself, has little sympathy while witnessing Dick brutally hang but manages to feel saddened for the man who murdered four members of a well respected family in the community during his execution, then it must be true what Capote has conveyed all along: while Dick deserved the hatred and disgust, Perry was partly a victim deserving some degree of pity and sympathy. Describing the sheriff's feelings towards Perry as impossible to "disregard," Capote conveys that even in the most terrible of situations, even the people who should hate him the most, Perry manages to summon pity. The idea of Perry being an "exiled animal" and "wounded creature" portrays Perry as a victim of his environment contrasted to a wicked beast that was born innately evil. This idea underlies Capote's ultimate differentiation between Dick and Perry: innate evil versus learned evil, respectively.

Through these differing representations Capote ultimately argues that there are those who are true evil and those that linger just long enough on the side of evil that they are taken hold by evil's unwavering grip. They are the vulnerable, they are Perry. Ultimately, Capote's choice to represent Dick as an uncaring man with parents who desperately tried to help and Perry as a full-grown child who still suffers from the love he had that was never returned, supports Nick Rance's criticism of *In Cold Blood*. Rance believes Capote largely wrote from a bias standpoint by placing the blame of Smith's violent nature on the environment he grew up in, relieving him of responsibility (82). Rance writes that Capote positions Perry's life story in a way that starkly contrasts with the ideal American life of the Clutters.

Rance's belief that Capote contrasted Perry's childhood with the family life of the Clutters to intentionally amp up his environmental argument lends itself to the idea that perhaps Capote is commenting on the idea of the American dream. The Clutters are a perfect example of hard working, faith-oriented, humble Americans. They represent the ideal American dream, one that rewards diligence and human decency. Perry's parents, on the other hand, are victims of the failed American dream. They represent the perversion of the dream that ends in terrible dismay. Perry's parents' marriage comes to an end early in his childhood. He is thrown between parents, constantly disappointed by each of them. Perry's childhood ultimately represents a more realistic version of the American dream; one that fails to work out for everyone, or for those who do not fit the "ideal". Perhaps Capote means to illuminate that those who do not fit the construct of the ideal American, drown in society's expectations that are merciless and impossible to stand up to. If in fact this is the case, then no wonder Perry ended up the way he did. Perry results from a family that fails to fit the norm.

V: Sexuality

Perry too fails to fit the norm and has some quirks that are not accepted by society. He is described as being somewhat mutilated, a surprising form for a human being. Capote's first description of Perry's physical appearance brings light to these abnormalities:

Some sections of him were not in proportion to others. His tiny feet... would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers; when he stood up, he was no taller than a twelve-year old child, and looked, strutting on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported, not like a well-built truck driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound (15).

Capote's choice to describe Perry's body as "grotesque" transcends a merely physical description and manifests itself as a testament to Perry's character. The connotation of this word is associated with dark, troubling, mysterious ideas. Immediately Capote prepares Perry as a soul different from others, one that requires detailed attention and deep analysis to fully understand.

Furthermore, Capote uses descriptions that attempt to portray Perry as childish, referring to his height as that of "twelve-year old child," and describing his legs as "inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported". Perry therefore seems frozen in this childish state, an image that is constantly renewed throughout the novel with descriptions of Perry's emotional, fragile nature. Solidifying Perry as ultimately still a child functions to further support Capote's argument about Perry's evil inclinations as partly due to the negative environment in which he grew up. Capote seems to be arguing, then, is that when trauma is experienced at a young age in life, one is at risk for developing an evil nature? Perry, however, seems to simultaneously hold on to his young innocent disposition while also displaying monstrous qualities. Perry comes across as a changeling, a tragically divided being, at once innocent and monstrous, a child and a man, delicate and brutish.

Finally, Capote deliberately associates Perry with femininity. He describes Perry as able to fit into a “delicate lady’s dancing slippers.” This arguably captures the feminine qualities associated with Perry’s personality. Perry himself even recognizes this femininity in himself as he admits his attraction to Dick arises from Dick’s ability to appear ““totally masculine”” (16). This further resonates with Perry’s queer tendencies, exemplified by Perry and Dick’s homosocial relationship. Dick often refers to Perry as “honey” and “baby”. However, it is clear that Dick recognizes Perry’s sensitive nature and uses it to his advantage. He coaxes Perry with loving words, providing him with the protection and the masculine-figure Perry needs. Later, Dick reveals that he cared very little for Perry and rather saw him as a pawn to be used in accomplishing his plan to rob the Clutter household. During his time on execution row, Dick says, “It’s too bad we can’t all be such sensitive souls like little Perry” (334). This is said in frustration with Perry’s aloof presence on death row, as Perry acts better than the other inmates. Here, again, Perry’s character puts him at risk to be taken advantage of by others who see his vulnerabilities, and reveal him as a victim of a tragic fate, a man with the potential to be something more than his circumstances.

In Cold Blood, according to critic Peter G. Christensen, portrays violence as a result of male bonding, as “violence substitutes for sexual expression” (64). Christensen writes: “Despite Capote’s denial of homosexual attraction between the team of murderers, here we can have a chilling example of men who exert what is perhaps a fatal influence over each other in the course of their bonding” (64). Each man, unable to act out his true sexual desires, enlists the other in cherished fantasies: Dick sees Perry as someone he can manipulate (just as he manipulates those he cons and perhaps manipulates the minors he preys upon sexually). Perry sees Dick as the ideal masculine companion in adventure. Christensen argues that the way each man uses the other to

bring to life some version of their forbidden fantasies signifies repression and sublimation in regards to male sexuality. However, this is far from blatant as sexuality fails to be a main theme throughout the story, despite the slight focus on Dick's pedophilic desires. This is where the "substitution" of violence for sexuality Christensen refers to arises. Rather than showing outward sexual expression, Dick constantly uses Perry as a pawn to further his own needs while Perry accepts Dick's controlling tendencies because of his attraction to Dick's overt masculine nature. Forced to redirect their sexual desires into each other, the men turn to conning, stealing, and violence.

Violence manifesting itself as a result of sexual suppression resonates with both Perry and Dick. During the 1950-60s, homosexuality in America was considered taboo, even a mental illness (Patterson). Not until 1974 did the American Psychiatric Association remove homosexuality from its list of psychological disorders (711). Homosexuals were subject to "police harassment and blackmail" especially during the age of McCarthyism (181). The American Psychological Association states, "public opinion studies over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s routinely showed that, among large segments of the public, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people were the target of strongly held negative attitudes,"⁵ illuminating that homosexuals faced overt prejudice well into the late 20th century, long after the executions of Dick and Perry and the publication of *In Cold Blood*. Christensen believes Capote refused to acknowledge homosexuality outright because of the negative social attitudes held by the public. He writes, "Post-Stonewall evaluations are likely to see Capote as a relic of the closeted age in which happy futures for gay characters and positive evaluations of deep male bonding are relatively unimaginable" (Christensen 66). Many homosexuals hid their sexual orientation and were forced

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to repress their urges, as men could not reasonably expect to be both happy and openly gay, as Christensen says this is rather “unimaginable”. Furthermore, Capote’s hand is forced in portraying Perry and Dick’s deep relationship as negative as Capote’s own credibility would be questioned if a relationship of this intensity and nature would be looked down upon by the larger American society. Critics mostly agree that Perry has homosexual tendencies, although he is never seen acting on them which further supports the idea that society forced homosexuals to repress their desires in order to be considered “normal” and to avoid ridicule.

Perry’s physical appearance lends itself to the idea of repression; as he is split between whom he must be in public and who he really is internally. The top half of Perry is described as that of a bodybuilder, strong, fit, capable, and most importantly normal. However, Capote is quick to point out that Perry’s body is not proportional. Perry’s lower half, as stated above, resembles that of a feminine child’s. Therefore, physically, Perry embodies a split man. This represents the life Perry lived: not only in his torn ways between a god-fearing man and a murderer, but also between a largely asexual man and a man with homosexual desires. As a result, Perry’s energies are redirected into fantasy and criminality.

Throughout the novel, Perry constantly reveals his loathing for those with sexual perversions, those who simply cannot control themselves. Dick himself represents one of these people that Perry so loathes. According to Perry, Dick described relations with young girls he previously had and it filled Perry with disgust.

The book itself seems to be in mutual agreement with Perry’s disgust for perverse individuals. Capote arguably aligns Dick with the terrible Nun from Perry’s childhood. Dick, as indicated by his pedophilic nature and desire to rape Nancy, has little to no control over his sexual cravings. As an orphan in a detention home Perry had no control over the Nun’s actions

who rubbed ointment over his penis that caused terrific pain. Therefore, Perry felt a lack of control in relation to his own sexuality, as he failed to protect the center of his sexuality. From that moment on it seems Perry becomes over controlling of his sexuality, exuding an asexual quality perhaps because of his association of physical intimacy with intense pain, a result of the sexual abuse from the nun and the harsh treatment from his own father. Therefore, Perry recognizes Dick's uncontrollable sexual desires as exactly what he hopes to never feel again, a lack of control in his own sexual life. Furthermore Dick resembles the nun in the way that they both take advantage of people who cannot defend themselves. Dick takes advantage of children whom are too small to physically fight back. Perry's perspective not only attributes such abusers as the ultimate cause for his own sexual dysfunction but also aligns with the public's hatred for the uncontrolled sexual fiend. For the entire novel, Perry only has two relationships that could possibly resemble forms of intimacy: his relationship with Dick and the friendship he forms in prison with Willie-Jay, a particularly Christian prisoner that Perry views as a Jesus figure. Otherwise, Perry appears largely asexual. He reveals little desire to find a woman and settle down but rather focuses so determinedly on making Dick happy, on keeping his friendship with Dick alive. Dick, on the other hand, seems hypersexual, expanding a normal population of sexual partners to include young children.

In this way, Perry and Dick are once again dichotomized. Dick's perversion lacks explanation as he faced no tragic sexual abuse as a child and had plenty of girlfriends, not to mention wives, in his life. This once again supports the idea that Dick's evil tendencies arise from an innate quality, a quality that he was with born. Perry's asexual nature not only is more acceptable in society's eyes but can also be explained by the abandonment he felt by his parents and his negative experience with sexual abuse during his childhood. This further drives home the

idea that Perry is a product of his environment, molded and shaped to become a monster, rather than being born as one.

While the representations of Dick and Perry's sexuality diverge in this way, they do resemble each other in one facet: both tendencies are viewed as odd by society. They represent a minority, operating on the edges of society. This is made even clearer by Capote's focus on Nancy Clutter's relationship with Bobby Rupp. Capote portrays this relationship as the quintessential American young love. Their relationship began when Bobby first asked Nancy to their middle school dance and continued into a courtship marked by the ID bracelet Nancy wore on her wrist and the occasional fibs surrounding adolescent worries. On the night of the murder, Bobby had been at the Clutter home. Bobby recounts what he remembered from the night: "Nancy walked me out. We talked a while, and made a date to go to the movies Sunday night... Then she ran back in the house, and I drove away. It was clear as day—the moon was so bright—and cold and kind of windy; a lot of tumbleweed blowing about. But that's all I saw" (Capote 52). This quote from Bobby functions to pigeonhole the scene as normal, a typical night a teenage boy would have leaving his girlfriend's home. The short succinct sentences and lack of detail illuminate a general feeling of normalcy, as if nothing out of place could be detected. This anecdote of Bobby and Nancy's relationship can be used to understand their greater relationship as whole, as a normal relationship a boy and girl might have while growing up in the American countryside and therefore a relationship the majority of Americans would understand and furthermore approve of.

Upon recollection of the night Bobby said, "Only now when I think back, I think somebody must have been hiding there. Maybe down among the trees. Somebody just waiting for me to leave" (53). By including this detail, Capote juxtaposes Bobby's memory of what

seemed like a normal night in Holcomb with his later belief that something abnormal lurked outside of the Clutter home. Therefore, Capote uses Bobby to suggest that the two men who murdered the Clutter family not only took their lives, but disrupted all sense of normalcy that once existed. Perry and Dick, consequently, are representations of the abnormal. The fact that this interjection of the abnormal into the normal is specifically presented in regards to the romantic and sweet relationship of Nancy and Bobby connotes that Dick and Perry are distinctly different than that of Nancy and Bobby, and that therefore their desires are not that of the typical American but rather of something foreign and taboo.

Therefore, one can argue that when it comes to sexuality, Capote constructs a binary of the normal and abnormal. However, like the binary of good and evil it doesn't seem like there is a clear way to define abnormal and normal. Rather, this too is a spectrum. Dick's sexual perversion lies on the abnormal side of the binary. Perry's sexuality, on the other hand, is only abnormal in the way that he simply does not express sexuality. This is much more desirable than one who expresses sexuality towards children. While Perry may lean towards the abnormal side of sexuality, he certainly does not belong where Dick stands. Therefore, normal and abnormal seems to lie on a spectrum, with Dick aligned absolutely with abnormal, and Perry somewhere in between the two.

Eric and Dylan of Cullen's *Columbine* resemble Dick and Perry in their perverse sexual natures. Cullen represents Eric as a quick-tempered, dangerous lover. This is portrayed through the prom charade Cullen retells. Although Eric seems to have little trouble initially wooing a woman, he struggles to keep them around which manifests in angry outbursts. Cullen describes Eric's hunt for a prom date. Initially, Eric believed he had secured an older woman as his date for prom, which fills Eric with pride and flatters his gigantic ego. However, the woman ends up

backs out of the dance and Eric becomes enraged, leaving nasty messages on her answering machine. Later, Cullen reveals Eric's threatening message towards women in general on his website where he revealed much of his loathing for the world and its inhabitants. This behavior certainly seems unhealthy and is perhaps indicative of a possibility for Eric to turn into a physical abuser. Cullen plugs Eric with many risk factors, insinuating a tendency in Eric to mistreat women. However, one must wonder how many of Eric's potentially harmful intimacy issues are really due to his young age, a simple struggle with teenage love issues? The answer lies in Dylan.

While Cullen represents Eric's intimate relations as nothing but dangerous, Dylan's, while pathological, are portrayed as those of a desperate, lonely teenager. Cullen constantly portrays Dylan as not only desperate for love, but utterly obsessed with finding it and severely depressed when his efforts fail. Cullen describes the contents of Dylan's journal, claiming the most common word in the journal was in fact "love". Cullen then describes Dylan's disturbing relationship with a girl, Harriet, from his school that provides an anecdote to this obsession with love. The fact that Dylan actually never talked to Harriet but still managed to be madly in love with her is particularly disturbing, especially when considering the radical negative emotional effect it had on his mental health. This love sickness is much more acceptable in society, although many would be concerned at the extreme effect it took on him as Dylan's depressive stunts he slipped into after disappointing love affairs are fairly uncommon for boys his age. Importantly, this lovesickness is pitiable and heart wrenching. Dylan's feelings, however intense, are relatable, therefore making him more human.

By providing this anecdote, Cullen naturalizes Dylan as nothing more than a boy stricken with heartbreak. Who hasn't experienced heartbreak? Heartbreak is perhaps one of few struggles

that is relatable to almost anyone. Therefore, Dylan is seen as a boy struggling to find his place in the world and perhaps having a difficult time with the tumultuous period in every teenager's life when life is changing and they are forced to think about leaving home and what they want to do with the rest of their lives.

These responses to Eric and Dylan's love lives are polar opposites. Perhaps, by himself, Eric would seem like a young boy responding with anger when faced with rejection. However, Eric is dichotomized with Dylan. Positioning Dylan as an incredibly pitiable character, Cullen makes it seem that the issues Eric faces are not normal for a teenage boy: Dylan's are. Rather, Eric's issues are another manifestation of his innately evil character. Eric's anger issues in intimate relationships therefore align with his psychopathic tendencies and desires to bring about human extinction. Like the pair of Dick and Perry in *In Cold Blood*, both boys have pathologies when it comes to their love lives. However, like Perry, Dylan's bouts with depression as a result of tough lessons in love, are understandable. Like Dick, Eric's problems are unacceptable, as Cullen suggests that Eric could and most likely would turn to domestic violence later in life that, like pedophilia, is largely looked down upon by society. Therefore, Dylan's positioning in the spectrum of normal to abnormal is somewhere in between while Eric remains with Dick, on the abnormal edge of the scale.

VI: Conclusion

In Cold Blood and *Columbine*, while great literary feats, pose several controversial questions for society. These texts recount crimes that are hard to understand—and hence invite complex literary treatment—even though they appear, at first sight, to be utterly black and white. Should we view all murderers as simply evil? Or do the perpetrators deserve an investigation? If

in this investigation, we find a terrible childhood full of neglect and abuse behind the killer, what is to be done with them? Do we treat them the same as those who commit evil acts just for the sake of evil? Or do we act to rehabilitate them, to give them some glimmer of hope in their rather hopeless lives? Yes, it is easy to condemn murderous men as pure evil. But is easy always right? Capote and Cullen argue that in fact this is the wrong approach.

Defining an act as evil, according to Eagleton, is a “way of bringing arguments to an end” (8). Labeling a man or an act evil simplifies human nature, as if it can be neatly organized into categories of good or evil, with no grey area. Through their portrayals of the murders and the perpetrators, the authors of these two pieces of literary journalism present an entirely different world, a more nuanced version that allows for all people and all events to embody both good and evil simultaneously. They show the danger of this quick-handed labeling, one that leads juries to embody the ideal of justice congruent with the eye for an eye standard. Partitioning the world into halves of good and evil results in an ugly continuous cycle resulting in further death.

One can see Capote and Cullen’s deconstruction of the good and evil binary as a movement towards compassion. Through the perspective of a spectrum of good and evil, people are capable of salvation, as within them harbors some fruition of good. The spectrum calls for understanding, rather than judgment. Eagleton writes, “To understand all is to forgive all,” although we must recognize that the explanation we receive for crimes may not be sufficient for justification (6-7). Yet, before attributing these authors with creating a movement towards compassion, one must ask, why do both authors choose to represent one man as innately evil? Garrett offers an answer to this question. “It is quite necessary to engage as much of the reader’s sympathy as possible for Perry. So there has to be a foil, a sacrificial victim served up to ease the reader’s reluctant conscience and to appease... the reader’s taste for conventional morality”

(“Crime and Punishment” 8). Perhaps what both Capote and Cullen realize is that society cannot be completely inverted in one day, through one piece of literary work. So, rather than expose both murderers as victims of childhood tragedy, they portray one man as a spawn of natural-born evil. Arguably, Capote and Cullen would have faced public scrutiny if they had represented *both* men as sympathetic characters. Therefore, the presence of the archetypal evil figure in these texts, perhaps in this era, is not only necessary but is also a form of catharsis—justification of capital punishment and the confirmation of beliefs in “conventional morality”.

Until society recognizes a need to explore deeper into perpetrators’ lives and psychological health, hopeful people will face hopeless convictions with no chance of reconciliation while horrific crimes continue to occur. In the previous year alone the United States experienced wide scale murder tragedies including the movie theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado and the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. The decrease of stigma and increase of accessibility of psychological therapy is crucial to a deeper understanding of the people who commit heinous crimes and would prevent, although not all, the loss of innocent lives. If Dylan had seen a therapist then perhaps his depression could have been treated and he never would have latched onto someone like Eric. If Eric’s psychopathic tendencies were recognized from a young age, perhaps he never would have been able to plan and execute the Columbine shootings. If someone had listened to Perry’s troubling childhood stories, perhaps therapy could have helped him deal with the negative emotions and turned him away from crime. If Dick had received therapy immediately after his car accident, perhaps he would have reported feeling like a different person than he did before and his deadly downward cycle could have been stopped.

Meanwhile, the presence of the archetypal good and evil figures riddle our literature, media, children's stories and movies without investigative questions into why these characters are the way they are. Notably, the grey area between the good and evil binary is now more prominent in society than ever, a movement perhaps attributable to Capote himself and later fortified by Cullen. However, the grey area is far from understood and widely neglected. "The doctrine of absolute self-responsibility" and the robotic characterization of men as either good or evil eliminate any room for emotions, for real understanding, and for true and rightful justice (Eagleton 10). The world must completely eradicate binary categories and instead, adopt a mode of thought that takes context into consideration. Until society and the justice system make efforts to further understand the grey area between good and evil and transition to a modern morality, we risk losing what makes us human: empathy.

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