

EUROPE IN THE WRITINGS OF TRUMAN CAPOTE OR THE STEPS TO THE CREATION OF THE NONFICTION NOVEL

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Last 25th August 2004, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the death of the American writer Truman Capote and simultaneously, in the following months, two milestones in his literary career: the fortieth anniversary of Truman Capote's publication of the first lines of his masterpiece: *In Cold Blood*¹ and the forty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Local Color*, where the author gives a very personal and distinctive portrait of Europe; a kind of reportage of a post-war continent that now, years after, has just lived the expansion of the European Community last 1st of May. Due to the celebration of these events in the following months, it is the aim of this research to study the connexion between Truman Capote and Europe: his vision, his opinion, his writings, travels and, furthermore, the importance and the transcendent role of Europe as the root for the non-fiction novel in the making of *In Cold Blood*.

Europe has always been a recurrent topic in the history of American Literature. As a starting point for our issue, we think first of Henry James, who sent his characters to Europe searching, looking for the land of experience, looking for the "tree of knowledge", a place to learn and a place to be refilled with that experience and that knowledge². We think of *Washington Square* and how Dr. Sloper believed

¹ Although the book itself was published at the turn of the year 1965, the appearance of chapters or parts of the story in *The New Yorker* started after the summer of 1965. First chapter on the 25th September 1965. The second, on the 2nd October; third and fourth on the 9th and 16th of the same month. All of them would be published under the general title of *In Cold Blood* in the last days of the year.

² According to Brian Lee, James got a more complete sense of what America was from what he observed from the Europeans when he was living in Paris and when his "innate understanding of

that it would be in Europe where his daughter Catherine would mature and get the sense to be freed from the spell Mr. Townsend seemed to have on her. But this travel for experience occurs not only in fiction but also in real life. Edgar Allan Poe and, after him, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound came to Europe and instantly became European. Then, in the twenties and on, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Stein or Dos Passos, in other words, The Lost Generation, made their way to Europe as well and created new characters living the European experience like, for example, those of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*.

Among other events, the First and the Second World War and, in addition, the Spanish Civil War came and Europe suffered one of its most serious events of destruction. World War II, in particular, made American people look at our continent with a different perspective. Some American writers felt the need to account for and participate in the coverage of that destructive time and those destructive events. Some, like Langston Hughes, Ernest Hemingway or John Dos Passos faced war as close as they could. The stories of war and devastation mixed with the idea of a new flourishing and a new renaissance in the post-war Europe provoked an immediate and sudden interest for writers to come and see with their own eyes what the old continent had to offer. Among others, Langston Hughes, Tennessee Williams, Paul and Jane Bowles, Henry Miller, Katherine Anne Porter, Newton Arwin, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Jack Dunphy, Gore Vidal, Eugene O'Neill and... Truman Capote made the journey to discover "the European reality."

But when and why did Truman Capote come to Europe? Where did he go? How did his European experience mix with his writings? Why are his writings significant in this important moment in the history of Europe? These are some of the questions we are going to deal with in the next pages.

In order to establish the place and the time of the writer, we would like to start by providing some biographical information on the author. Truman Capote was born in New Orleans in 1924. He was linked to the south of the United States in his early years and subsequently moved to New York, where he spent most of his life. At the age of eight, he had just written his first narrative "Mr. Old Busybody" an account of the small community he lived in. But it was in 1943 that he received some recognition with short stories, some of which will appear as a collection in *A Tree of Night* in 1949.

Capote's vision of Europe is distilled in his literature from 1946 to the end of his career; it started with three sketches of the limited edition of *Local Color* ("To Europe", "Ischia" and "A Ride Through Spain"). They contained information about his first and second trip to Europe at the end of the forties. In addition, his vision of

America was brought into a much clearer focus in the Parisian salons of Madame Viardot and Madame Blocqueville, where he met Flaubert, Daudet, Maupassant..." and especially when he was accepted as one of them (Lee: 85).

Europe is included in the 1956 book *The Muses Are Heard*, a journey to the former USSR to cover a musical performance in Leningrad and the first reportage book of the writer. Before that, two exceptional novels, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in 1948 and *The Grass Harp* in 1951, contributed to his success as a young writer. In 1966 he was acclaimed by readers and critics with the publication of *In Cold Blood*, a true account of a crime that started a new genre, the “nonfiction novel.”

In 1973, the writer published *The Dogs Bark*, defined by him as “a prose map, a written geography of my life”³. The book contains stories, essays and sketches (“Fontana Vecchia”, “Lola”, “Greek Paragraphs” and “Self- Portrait”) that complete the writer’s vision of Europe through his experiences around the Mediterranean at the beginning of the fifties and in the sixties. Finally, in the unfinished novel *Answered Prayers*, published in 1984, in the chapter titled “Unspoiled Monsters” the writer returns to the times of his first trips to Paris, Venice and Tangier. He died, as we said at the beginning of this research, on the 25th of August, 1984, in Los Angeles. We mentioned that it is in these works that the reader would find Capote’s vision of Europe. And it is there where the reader can see that the writer’s life and works are completely entwined; the works in which Capote photographs Europe cannot be separated from his very personal experience, as we analysed in *Ficción y Realidad en la obra de Truman Capote* (2003). It will be, then, necessary to use some biographical data to complete the meaning of this research.⁴

1. LOCAL COLOR (1950)

Local Color, a nine sketch collection published in 1950⁵, is the first serious attempt of the author to look for a new system of writing, mixing fiction and reality, reportage and imagination. These *Travel Sketches* “are, in fact, varied exercises in local color writing, as the general title accurately denotes, and Capote’s objective in each of the nine pieces was to capture the flavour of the specific location and achieve a sense of “place”⁶ and the collection is “a truthful book of travel impressions”⁷ and a “collection of perceptive and civilized travel pieces that marked Capote’s first literary departure from the shadowy bordered between dream and reality.”⁸ In those lines, the reader will find two constant features that exist

³ Preface to *The Dogs Bark*, p. xvi.

⁴ Biographical data given comes mainly from two sources. First, from our investigation and traveling following the steps of Truman Capote in those places, from London to Paris and from there to Venice, and also to Rome, Berlin or New York, and second from the use of his biography written by Gerald Clarke in Cardinal, London, 1989 and by the analysis of the Truman Capote’s papers in the Private archives of the New York Public Library.

together: first, a remarkable exercise on local color writing, as Reed says, remarking any single aspect that makes a person or a place different, inimitable or exclusive, using real people and dates and fictionalising in details. His characters are, as usual, chosen for their eccentricity and peculiarity; what he tries to find, among other things, is authenticity. Second, these writings are sketches and preparations for the non-fiction novel. The first lines of this 1948 sketch are quite indicative of these features.

“To Europe”, written in 1948, represents a change, a trip from the American to the European. In that text we can locate the characteristics we mentioned above and, in addition, the basic idea necessary to understand his works: Europe was for him “a bridge to childhood”

It was right that I had gone to Europe, if only because I could look again with wonder. Past certain ages or certain wisdoms it is difficult to look with wonder; it is best done when one is a child; after that, and if you are lucky, you will find a bridge to childhood and walk across it. Going to Europe was like that. (1950: 56)

As Capote was an unwanted child, having been left in the care of some relatives practically from the day of his birth without the presence of a mother or a father, the reader can imagine the feelings that an infant Capote could have had for his parents at the time. On the other hand, the figure of his aunt Sook, so present in his literature, and the help of friends like the writer Harper Lee, also made those years a time of invention, imagination and an explosion of innocence⁹. However, with childhood the most important, decisive, painful, shocking, defining, influent and crucial period in the life of this American author, it is interesting to note the relevant role of the old continent in Capote’s life. Childhood was the place to come back¹⁰. In spite of the difficulties of his early years as hard as they had been, he was always pleased to look back. In fact, in the same year, 1948, Capote published

⁵ Includes “New Orleans”, “New York”, “Brooklyn”, “Hollywood”, “Haiti”, “To Europe”, “Ischia”, “Tangier” and “A Ride Through Spain”. The book contains interesting photographic material by Cecil Beaton, Karl Bissinger, Cartier-Bresson, Clifford Coffin, Louis Faurer, George Hoynigen Huene and Alexander Liberman. All of the sketches were previously published in magazines like Harper’s Bazaar, Mademoiselle, The New Yorker or Vogue from 1946 to 1950. We have chosen for this essay the collected stories in the book *Local Color*.

⁶ Kenneth T. Reed in *Truman Capote*. Twayne Publishers p.96.

⁷ Truman Capote’s interview with George Plimpton in *The New York Times Book Review*. 16 Jan1966. p.38-43.

⁸ Interview with Eric Norden in *Playboy* March 1968 p.56-62.

⁹ The relationship between Harper Lee and Truman Capote in their childhood can be also traced in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

¹⁰ There is an essential book on Truman Capote’s childhood in order to check this conflict between pain and pleasure and that is *Truman Capote’s Southern Years* written by Marianne Moates in 1989. This is a good example of how Capote’s childhood influenced every other moment in the life of the writer and the contradictory feelings he had to face when looking back to those times.

Other Voices, Other Rooms, which represented that harmful, pleasant and contradictory trip back to the “age of innocence”.

This is what he has to face when going to Europe. Truman Capote (1950:56) writes that he “had to go all the way to Europe to go back to my hometown, my fire and my room where stories and legends seemed always to live beyond the limits of our town. And that is where the legends were: in the harp, the castle and the rustling of the swans.” His trip to Europe was an initiation trip, it was like coming back to innocence, to the opening of the senses, to come back to the ideas and imagination¹¹. Europe, in a sense, like childhood, was a moment to learn, to get knowledge.

His restless search for those legends, for those stories, for oddities and the extraordinary or “the grotesque” transports him to Europe, where, as Gerald Clarke says his “fame preceded him.” The American edition of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* had just arrived in the continent with his polemic cover photograph and with the attraction of the writer’s personality as well when Truman Capote boarded The Queen Elizabeth in May 1948¹². In London, at that time, everybody was eager to meet Capote, everybody wanted to meet the “infant terrible” of the American Letters.

He primarily stayed in London at the Claridge’s¹³. His first stop had to be London, the first stop had to be the country of his mother language, the first reference in Europe, the roots, more for tradition than for a special cultural interest; he was not even keen on sightseeing. In the words of the writer, “it is my policy to leave heavy sightseeing to others. I’ve never cared to burden myself with churches and relics. I like people, cafés and the stuff in shop windows”¹⁴. His main goal there was to meet the British intellectuality from Auden to Maugham.¹⁵; it includes the

¹¹ Although Truman Capote was born in New Orleans, it is the little town of Monroeville, Alabama he refers as “his city”. After being born, and as it has been previously stated, he was left to the care of “three quarrelsome ladies” in that small town some kilometers away from the capital. Those were hard moments for the writer.

¹² Truman Capote, for his attitude and personality had been described as narcissistic, not fair, eccentric, etc... so people wanted to meet that “freak”. The photograph had been taken by Henry Cartier- Bresson showing Capote lying on a kind of sofa, quite insinuating.

¹³ It was a hotel of Capote’s taste. Quite traditional, near Buckingham Palace in the fashionable district of Mayfair, full of classic splendor and elegance kept through the years. We were in the rooms Capote stayed in those days and we can define them as pleasant, classy and elaborately decorated. Anyway, with the time he preferred the Ritz, now close to his first one hundred year anniversary. For him, The Ritz was one of the best and the most glamorous hotels in the world.

¹⁴ “Extreme Magic” in *A Capote Reader*, p.347.

¹⁵ There is a legend about a meeting he had arranged with E.M. Forster (he thought Forster was “one of the finest English novelists” (Gobel:62)). He had to meet E.M. Forster in Cambridge. He left Oxford walking and after a long walk he phoned Forster saying it was impossible for him to find the place. Capote had thought Cambridge and Oxford were the same thing or in a nearby distance. He had to apologize. (Clarke, p.165.)

acclaimed photographer Cecil Beaton, a friend for life and a participant in some Capote's books. In spite of his active social life in England, he left as soon as he could. He thought he did not fit in there and, years later, Capote would affirm that London was "provincial", "utterly dull" "dead" and "so civilized".¹⁶ Capote spent a "terribly good time in London but oh dear it is a dreary place."¹⁷

But the tendency for the American writers in general is to start the trip in England, in London, and then head towards the Mediterranean, where the fine weather, the light, the intuition reside. Capote's next move toward the Mediterranean, towards the muses, towards the inspiration, towards the light was Paris. It is in the unfinished novel *Answered Prayers* (1984) that he talks about Paris. Although Paris had not completely recovered from the war, and it was not much to the liking of the writer, it was something different from London. Like night and day. London had been dark and grey, a place difficult to have good food and impossible to have a night out, where streets were deserted by ten o'clock¹⁸.

And Paris still with the post-war measures and the post-war atmosphere, was like the sun for the writer, the light¹⁹. For a writer like Gore Vidal that time was "a glamorous time for all of us. Prices were low, the food was marvellous, and there was a little traffic and no pollution; the light was extraordinary. In one's memory will always be summer, with empty streets, all that light, and just one taxicab slowly approaching slowly in the middle distance."²⁰ For Capote, Paris was a brilliant place that was trying to start living again. He insists on the idea in his letters. For example, he says that "Paris is madly beautiful, it is the only time in my life I have felt really relaxed." (2004:56). And the first thing he wanted to visit was its cafés and clubs, especially, Le Café Flore, one of the literary totems of the French cultural world²¹.

¹⁶ "Self-Portrait" in *The Dogs Bark*,..408.

¹⁷ Capote's opinion in a letter to Leo Lerman in *Too brief a treat. The Letters of Truman Capote*, edited by Gerald Clarke, 2004,p.54.

¹⁸ "For everybody two weeks in England was more than enough: depressing, grey, dowdy and dispirited. Stringent rationing was still in effect, good food was all but impossible to find. At ten o'clock streets were deserted. Victory over Germany had not brought the expected surcease to Britain privations, and the whole country seemed pervaded by a mood of hopelessness and perish exhaustion, a kind of national acedia." (Clarke:166)

¹⁹ Carpenter reproduces the words that Ezra Pound wrote in *Poetry* in 1913 and that are as appropriate in 1948. Pound maintains that it would be better for the American poets to pay attention to Paris and not to London. (Carpenter:204)

²⁰ Gore Vidal in an interview with Gerald Clarke on the 3rd of May, 1972.(Clarke:167-168)

²¹ Le Café Flore is one of the best-known, most traditional and most symbolic in Paris together with Le Café des Deux Magots and Le Brasserie Lipp in the same area of Saint Germain des Pres. It hosted the literary-and also political- gatherings of the French Cultural world: Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir, etc.. . We had the opportunity to witness this bohemian atmosphere (little by little tourists are outnumbering writers and the world of letters in a non-stop process) and discover the place reserved for those writers to talk.

As it had happened in England, the French intellectuality wished to meet this young and promising new American writer and Capote wanted to meet them. As an admitted follower and admirer of Proust²² he was also interested in meeting those with whom he or his writings had some kind of connexion. In fact, he met André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Colette, Anais Nin, Albert Camus and Sartre. The result of those meetings was the creation of some personal sketches similar to those of travels included in his books *Observations* and *The Dogs Bark*²³. However, in the story called “The White Rose” (1970), included in *The Dogs Bark*, we find the report of the meeting, told from 1970, when the writer recalls what happened “twenty three years ago” between Capote and Colette in her last days. This episode is also retold in “Unspoiled Monsters” with the same efficiency.²⁴

And I kept consulting my watch, for at four o'clock I have an appointment with this legendary artist, an invitation to tea obligingly obtained for me by Jean Cocteau after I had told him, with youthful maladroitness, that Colette was the only French writer I entirely respected- and *that* included Gide, Genet, Camus and Montherlant not to mention M. Cocteau. Certainly, without the generous intervention of the latter, I would never have been invited to meet the great woman, for I was merely a young American writer who had published a single book, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, of which she had never heard at all. (1973: 12)

In the story, Capote tells how he got the date and how he visited “the *Grande Mademoiselle* of French letters” when she was quite ill and bedridden. He pays attention to an extensive collection of paperweights she owns and Colette gives him one of the crystal paperweights of the collection, “The White Rose”, as a gift. There is a clear symbolism: the crystal white rose represents the fragility and weakness and the coldness of the lady provoked by her failing health. Both writers play the role of character/person, as it is one of the characteristics in Capote’s narrative²⁵. In

We know Truman Capote would adore being the center of those literary sessions with his never-ending talk.

²² Just as an example of Capote’s admirations are the words he told Lawrence Grobel in an interview: “Proust is a great artist.”, p.131.

²³ One of the polemic aspects in Truman Capote’s literary career is his credibility. Donald Windham in his book *Lost friendships* affirms that Capote had never had large conversations with, for example, Andre Gide which would mean that part of the sketches are fiction and never happened. Anyway, there are other friends and critics that affirm the opposite, for example, Clarke. We analyzed this aspect in our *Ficción y Realidad en la Obra de Truman Capote (2003)* getting to the conclusion that Capote always idealizes and exaggerates but there is always a base for his writing. However, Capote’s vision of Europe is not really modified if Capote met two or three times the characters he writes about.

²⁴ The only difference is the person who prepares the meeting for him to meet Colette. In “The White Rose” is Jean Cocteau in “Unspoiled Monsters” is Natalie Barney. *Answered Prayers*, p.41.

²⁵ In *Colette A Life*, the biographer Herbert Lottman refers to this meeting Capote is talking about, but specially to the nice description the writer made of Colette being so ill. There Capote is also described as an American young artist who had only published a book. (Spanish edition, 307. Circe: Barcelona,1992).

Sextet, John Malcolm Brinnin, writer and Capote's friend, transcribe Capote's words on the encounter

Gide gave me this ring, said Truman.... One day I went to see Colette, tea for two, in a boudoir that smell of sachet and cat pee. Cocteau said she'd never heard of me, but when he told her I looked ten years old and had a mind as wicked as Egypt, she got interested. The old darling, she looks like a doll saved from the fire. (Brinnin: 34)

His experience with Colette had encouraged twenty four year old Truman to go on searching for the French artists. In this sense, Capote also reports what he saw in the minds of Andre Gide and Jean Cocteau. In *The Dogs Bark*, Truman Capote depicts together the images of both French artists. From the text, the reader can see perfectly that the writer takes part for Jean Cocteau. The most important thing for our research is to hear in Capote's own words (1987:555) that "Cocteau has lived absolutely inside his time, and more than anyone else, formed taste in the present century. It is Cocteau's kinship with his own epoch, his exclusive concern with the modern, that lay at the root of Il Vecchio's (Gide) aversion". Capote's impression of Paris dealt with the romanticism of his vision completely apart from the crude reality of the European countries after the Second World War. Capote's interest in Europe did include neither history nor art or politics²⁶.

His real interests, once more, were promotion and to meet as many intellectuals as he could in order to suck from them ideas, experiences, lives, details, any little thing he could, afterwards, to make it bigger and transform it into something literarily valuable. He was deeply concerned with "human interests"²⁷ and it helped him to construct a reputation and a legend that, with the time, was hard to erase. Nevertheless, if Capote left England as soon as he could, he had some difficulty leaving France. He was fine there²⁸. However, it is necessary to note that

²⁶ Donald Windham refuses the authenticity of "To Europe" (1987:33-34) because Capote writes about a petty thief and eludes talking about the post-war, the barricades, the communists, etc... Capote always escaped from any kind of violence and the fact of not being interested in this or that aspect does not make the text better or worse or more or less realistic.

²⁷ Kenneth T. Reed's *Truman Capote*, p. 96.

²⁸ Capote's stay in Paris would have not been the same without the presence of Denham Fouts, "a fascinating figure, a male whore, a kind of dark angel of the Paris nighttime streets" (Plimpton:87). An indefinable person involved with all the American writers of the epoch and who sent a letter to Capote to visit him in Paris once he had seen the pervious photograph in the cover of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. He is so important that not only Capote made him a character in his fiction but also Gore Vidal and Christopher Isherwood. But the appearance of Fouts in the literature of Truman Capote is linked to Paris. In this sense, in "Unspoiled Monsters", the writer admits that when he thinks of Paris he thinks in Hotel Pont Royal and Rue du Bac, two places where Capote lived and two sights in the literary quarter next to the Seine that we have also visited and nearby distance for one of Hemingway's residences in the French capital. The café in the Hotel Pont Royal was also one of the meeting points for the French and American cultural world..

Capote's memories of those days, written at the end of his life, are not accurate. As we will analyse later on, 1966 changed the life of the author and changed his character, becoming a more arrogant, irascible, negative and contradictory person. Therefore, his opinions in "Unspoiled Monsters" must be taken cautiously.

But the "bridge to his childhood" that he was looking for, the place where he could feel more at home was Italy. In Italy he found the light, the original, the peace, the nature, the ideas and the atmosphere to feel as good as home. Although Capote travelled widely throughout Italy and visited cities like Rome, Florence and Milan, he had a romance with Venice. Venice was "hopelessly beautiful" and "the most enchanted thing on earth."²⁹

The writer describes the beauty and the charm of the place and its people³⁰ and describes the city as "a museum with carnivalesque overtones, a vast palace that seems to have no doors, all things connected, one leading to one another." He continues with the description of the noise coming from the busy canals of this still beautiful and compact city where "over and over in a day the same faces repeat like prepositions in a long sentence" And he insists on the picture of the city when he says that "But to avoid anyone in Venice is much the same as playing hide and seek in a one-room apartment, for there was never a city more compactly composed". Capote admires Venice and this admiration is increased for three places and people he met: Piazza San Marco, Donald Windham and Harry's Bar.

Piazza San Marco is a symbol for every one who has visited Venice. San Marco's Cathedral, its golden domes, its ornaments, its bell tower, its façade, its square opening to the Grand Canal, the music of violin in the cafés of the piazza, "il palazzo Ducal", etc.... Piazza San Marco is the centre of town, the heart of Venice. It became the heart of the writer and it is, at the same time, the starting point of the plot in "To Europe"³¹. It was in the Piazza where Capote met again Donald Windham, promising American writer and friend, around the 4th of July 1948, and where Windham became instantly friend, partner and character D. in fiction. It was there where Capote and D. met Lucia, a kind of petty thief and head of a robbers gang, for the first time. And it is precisely Donald Windham, the character named D. in Capote's story "To Europe" and the one who started this tortuous relationship with Lucia. D., "whose heart doesn't know that we are off the golden standard", gives a packet of Chesterfields to Lucia. What at the beginning was something funny and curious turned out to be something difficult to tolerate, as she followed

²⁹ Brinnin, p. 52.

³⁰ Tennessee Williams in a letter to Donald Windham refers to this when he says that "However, Italians are such sweet people that I am afraid I shall become a sentimentalist about the human race if I stay here" (1977:208).

³¹ Truman Capote chose the location of Piazza San Marco for a big quantity of photographs featuring the people most important to him, including his mother and his friend Donald Windham.

them everywhere in this labyrinth of streets and canals, even to the door of their hotel-room. This kindness made the girl persecute them.

They tried to get rid of her, but it was impossible, as she was always chasing them. Lucia's behaviour clearly resembles Miriam, an unforgettable character in one of Capote's first short stories³²; the only difference maybe her age and physical complexion (Lucia was "scarcely sixteen"). According to his fiction, in the persecution she becomes so insistent that they had to leave the city. The real reason apart from the story- to leave Venice was to write. He was so impressed that he had the need to write about Venice and, at the same time, he found the strength to finish a couple of stories he wanted to publish when coming back to New York. The place of escape chosen, Lago di Garda, "was truly, a sleeping beauty, not yet awakened by the post-war renewal of tourism." (Brinnin 1987:28) and Sirmoine was "an enchanted, infinitesimal village on the tip of a peninsula jutting into Lago di Garda, bluest, saddest, most silent, most beautiful of Italian lakes" (1950:56), "unique for its writing conditions"³³. Ezra Pound, for example, made the same trip as Capote and Windham. He "took a train to Lake Garda and settle at Sirmoine in the Hotel Eden" in order to "absorb sunlight for a month or two."³⁴ It is relevant to see how all these masters were looking for the same thing: the light, the sun, the inspiration, the peace.

But if San Marco and Donald Windham and Sirmoine were important, it is not less important a place near the piazza were both writers used to go: Harry's Bar. There, where the waters of the Grand Canal meet the entrance of the Grand Hotel, he and his friends used to go to meet other writers, to have lunch and, especially, to drink martinis. They were even referred as the American colony of Harry's bar. In *Answered Prayers*, Truman Capote recalls his experience at Harry's when he says that

... it was nightfall and time to hit Harry's Bar, blow in out of the cold and into the hearth-fire cheer of Mr. Cipriani's microscopic fine-food-and-drink palace. Harry's in winter is a different kind of madhouse from what it is the rest of the year-just as crowded, but at Christmas the premises belong not to the English or the Americans but to an eccentric local aristocracy...Every night I spent nine or ten dollars in Harry's-on martinis and shrimp sandwiches and heaping bowls of green noodles with sauce Bolognese. (1987: 68-69)

³² "Miriam", one of the first stories of Truman Capote, published for the first time in 1945 and after collected in *A Tree of Night and Other Stories*, is the story of a young girl who meets old and dear Mrs. Miller at the cinema and after that encounter she chased her and even came into her house taking possession of it and frightening the lady.

³³ Donald Windham talks about the benefits of the area for the literary creation and added that, at the same time and in the same hotel Robert Penn Warren and his wife stayed as well (1987:32).

³⁴ Carpenter, p. 144.

We had the opportunity to talk to Mr. Cipriani, Harry's bar owner and the one who prepared those martinis for Capote and friends³⁵, and he told us of the after hours drinking sessions and the "long lunchtimes" these writers had in the bar, of the obsession of the writer for the delicious prawn sandwiches and of Capote's curiosity to see the corner table where Hemingway used to sit. In some sense, Capote finds or looks for finding the eccentricity, the oddness that he had found in America, here in Europe³⁶.

Capote finished his trip to Europe on the 7th of August, 1948. The end of the first sketch in *Local Color*, "To Europe", meant the end of Truman Capote's first European trip. In the final lines of this writing he reproduces for the reader what Europe had meant for him.

In London a young artist said to me, "How wonderful it must be for an American travelling in Europe the first time: you can never be a part of it, so none of the pain is yours, you will never have to endure it; yes, for you there is only the beauty."

Not understanding what he meant, I resented this; but later, some months in France and Italy, and I saw that he was right: I was not part of Europe, I never would be. Safe, I could leave when I wanted to, and for me there was only the honeyed, hallowed air of beauty. But it was not as wonderful as the young man had imagined; it was desperate to feel that one could never be a part of moments so moving that always one would be isolated from this landscape and these people; and then gradually I realized I did not have to be part of it: rather it could be a part of me. (1950: 59-60)

The vision that Truman Capote got from Europe is clear. All Europe was "all a part of me, elements for the making of my own perspective." (1950:60) Although we have said before that he was not interested in politics, Capote was not blind and he realised and was conscious of the social and political status of the nations living on the consequences of the Second World War, with a whole continent trying to start living again after years of continuous degradation and disintegration. His idea of this continent was a transforming one. The vision of Truman Capote was not monumental or even cultural in the sense of the vast cultural legacy of Europe. Europe had other interests, something more day-to day, something more connected with the here and now, something in debt with the inner self. And the place where

³⁵ Even nowadays the Cipriani family runs Harry's Bar. In the last years, there has been a flourishing of Harry's Bars worldwide. However, the original and the only one still owned by their original proprietors is the one we are talking about in Venice.

³⁶ Harry's bar is a different place and it must have been more seducing in the forties and fifties. Capote lived in Harry's bar a communion with the place, the city, the owner and the local where to meet his American colleagues apart from trying delicious dishes (and quite expensive in the 21st century we must say).

he could be and feel more authentic, freer to develop his charm was Italy in general and Venice in particular.

When he came to Europe his first aim was not to write but, feeling like he did in Venice, he started getting the point and tried to finish two stories he wanted to publish when coming to the United States. We agree with Gerald Clarke when he says that Truman Capote's stay in Europe "affected him profoundly" not only personally or existentially or culturally, but also literarily. We also agree with Helen S. Garson (1980:121) when she said that "Europe provides the writer with an enormous sense of pleasure. He feels that the beauties he has seen in Europe will be part of the gardens, the flowers of every kind, the music, the exquisite vistas of the mountains and lakes." Europe gave Capote the key to his future writing. Not only will he report a person or an anecdote or a place, but a novel, a masterpiece. But that will be later.

On the 29th February, 1949, Truman Capote came back to Europe for the second time with his new lover Jack Dunphy in order to write. Capote wanted "a place in the sun. Period. Then, something pretty to look at when I raise my heavy head from the typewriter. People... I can do without..." "I want quiet...beautiful quiet and a nice little post office with outsize postage stamps and a donkey with a straw hat and flowers in his ears I can ride into the village" (Brinnin:41). On this visit they went to Ischia, Venice, Rome, Naples and a tiny stop in Paris, accompanied some times by Capote's friend/rival, Tennessee Williams.

So, this second visit led his idea of the continent to a second stage. Now, months after, Europe was like "the rest of the warrior", not only a place to establish links to his innocence, but also a place where he could feel safer, more comfortable and in love. It was in this atmosphere that he wrote "Ischia". "Islands are like ships at permanent anchor", is what Capote said in his sketch. He narrates the trip from Naples to Ischia,³⁷ talks about Capri, Naples and finally about the island of Ischia. This feeling of ease and relax, out of pressure, is clearly set in the next excerpt.

In the wrangle of disembarking, I dropped and broke my watch- an outrageous bit of symbolism, too pointed: at a glance it was plain that Ischia was no place for the rush of hours, islands never are. (1950: 64)

In Ischia, they stayed at a pension in Forio. From the Port d'Ischia "most people seldom stray from there" they went to Forio "at the farthest end of the island"(64). Sketches are a bridge not only to childhood but also to the nonfiction novel and to the autobiography of the writer. It is, for example, in this sketch that he gives the real dates for his stay on the island: first, April 5th, and then, June 5th. Their

³⁷ It is approximately a one hour trip leaving from Naples' port looking back to the two beautiful castles (Castel Nuovo and Castel dell'Ovo) and the entrance to a very peculiar city with the Galerie Umberto I, similar to the Galerie Vittorio Emmanuelle in Milan). Very busy port always filled with people departing mainly to Capri.

life on the island was to write in the morning and to socialize in the evening: “It is the time during the day that I see the other Americans living here: there are four at the moment and we meet at Maria’s café in the piazza...”(67). It is a bridge to reality as well when we check what Humphrey Carpenter tells us in his *W.H.Auden A Biography*³⁸ “In the evening, he would go to Maria’s café in the piazza, where at a round table outdoors he would hold court.”³⁹ They were living in such a way that the muses did the rest. Auden, for example, wrote the following poem to the island “...my thanks are for you,/ Ischia, to whom a fair wind has/brought me rejoicing with dear friends/from soiled productive cities. How well you correct/ our injured eyes, how gently you train us to see/ things and men in perspective/ underneath your uniform light”.⁴⁰ Or when Tennessee Williams, another illustrious American on the island, affirmed that “Ischia itself is a dream. I’m sure you’ll like it best of anything in Italy”.⁴¹

In the sketch, he admits having met Mussolini’s family, which, somehow gives a historical setting and, at the same time, extends the meaning of the narration. When there are no political references in Capote’s works, the appearance of small hints can be understood in a double sense: first, as the impetus to reflect coincidences or, second, as a reinforcement of reality through the appearance of a historical character who gives the text a place and time. However, he does not only talk about Mussolini’s wife or about Maria and her place, but also about a girl who makes and cleans the rooms and everything, her name is Gioconda.⁴² He talks of the island and of the beaches to get to the end of the sketch with a kind of farewell. After four months he goes back and he points to that relaxing time with a paragraph evoking change: change in the season, change in the weather, change in the colour of the day, change in his humour and change in his literature.

It is Gioconda who puts that end to the text. “Gioconda says it has been the longest spring she can remember”. This is the end of the sketch and it is like a door open, allowing the fresh air to enter, symbolizing that he could finally relax and work and write and be happy at the same time. In Ischia his feelings are like they

³⁸ We admit the fact of W.H. Auden as an American due to the fact that he got the American nationality in 1946, as Francois Duchere describes in his book p. 179.

³⁹ According to Gerald Clarke (197), Auden’s “prickly and tyrannical personality did not win him many dear friends in Ischia.”

⁴⁰ Auden’s *Collected Poems* (1976) edited by Edward Mendelson, p. 416.

⁴¹ Tennessee Williams in a letter to Donald Windham on the eighth of April 1949 (Windham 1977: 237).

⁴² We believe this lady existed with the same duties and problems as Capote reports but it might not be with the same name. The reason is what we find in Carpenter’s biography about W.H.Auden. In that book, Carpenter maintains that “they engaged a handsome local boy called Giocondo to look after the house and possibly to provide sexual services.” (363) We are sure he liked the name and changed it for the sake of style. We know of Graziella, or G., another character in Capote’s writings and we will refer to in the next lines.

had been in Sirmoine before and he affirms (Brinnin:43) that he is not “only happy but in a condition in which I have rarely found myself- a state of contentment.” where “he is filled with knowledge that his trip has revived in him a childlike sense of wonder. For him it allows a return to the landscape of the imagination.” (Garson:121) Italy was “a prospect of bliss” and he seemed “to float in an aura of affection given and received. Instead of compulsions to flaunt himself, he simply is himself”⁴³.

Although the next story in the book is “Tangier”, we have to say that the next one in chronological order was “A Ride Through Spain”. On his way to Tangier-where Gore Vidal and Paul Bowles awaited them - Capote has to cross the Peninsula and it is on this trip, especially from Granada to Algeciras on the second of July, where he got part of his vision of Spain.

From the 19th century on, there have always been two visions of Spain. On one hand, a romantic view, black, full of bandoleers, thieves, that is reminiscent of the black paintings by Goya; something that increases the idea of Spain as an “African” country, a place full of legends and fantasies. On the other hand, a brighter vision, kinder, more realist, full of vitality, sun and colour which reminds of the paintings of Sorolla, for example. Capote’s vision of Spain has to do with the post- Civil War time and the difficulty to comprehend a dictatorial regime. He was really impressed by what he saw here in Spain because he hadn’t experienced anything like that before; even Paris in its effort to come out of the dark was nothing like the Spanish post-war atmosphere⁴⁴. Then, he decides to include his narrative in *Local Color* as another exercise to practise his skills at reporting techniques. Capote, as he did in the South of the United States, would reflect the splendour of Granada and its contraposition to an obsolete train, completely cracked, full of soldiers and guards and with a sort of psychosis, due to the possible appearance of hidden bandoleers in the mountains.

Only one day travelling along Spain made Capote find what he was looking for, the inspiration, the action after the relaxation. For Capote, the obsession, adventure or mystery, characteristics from Poe, were essentials that made that train, that trip, that day, that country, that second of July genuine, different and unique. So special (and exhausting) was this Spanish quick stay for the writer that he gives details and puts forward his sketch to his friends in letters to Cecil Beaton, Robert Linscott or Andrew Lindon (Clarke 2004:91-93) He was amazed instantly by the broken window of the carriage, by the immense heat and the distinctive light of the Spanish south, by the guards and by the passengers, by the cat and by the feeling of

⁴³ Brinnin’s diary entry of September 22, 1950, p. 53.

⁴⁴ Due to his involvement in that time and also due to the little time he spent in Spain on that visit, the reader will note that Capote’s point of view differs from that of Hemingway, Irving or Bowles in style, interests and focus.

being somewhere different. Everything caught in a second, captured like an image of an impressionist painting.

From the beginning of the sketch he points on the Puritanism of that time and he comments on the arid prairies of the country. From general to particular he describes countryside, train and people. People that, described in America, could have been taken as southerners for their oddness. The oppressive vision of Spain in times of Franco also appears in the text describing, at the same time, a train moving much too slow, as if it were a toy, with broken windows, with soldiers everywhere⁴⁵. And what is more amazing, the author teaches the strictness that must govern any act of the soldiers and guards.

Meanwhile, Capote (1950:89) photographs the Spanish landscape and made his vision of Europe wider and more realistic when he pays attention to the parasols and “water vendors.” The landscape, the calm and the drowsiness are progressively splashed with that mystery we were talking about. There would always be a moment when the story turns “...without preface a spatter of bullet fire strafed the dozy silence.”

Although it is unlikely and it is not the most important element of the text, there is no way to know if that day of July 1949, situations and events like those were still common practise. In fact, the most remarkable aspect of the sketch is the image of Spain, the perception or intuition of the bandoleers, a vision of Spain that comes from the fight of the Spanish nation against the French invaders from the 19th century where to rob the rich to give to the poor or to rob in order to survive hidden in the mountains were habitual practice. No doubt it was a vision that in the second half of the twentieth century may be idealized and more romantic and realistic. That image which contains a very peculiar Andalusian atmosphere is increased by the following scene in the text in which the writer and the passengers discovered that the noise was “a machine gun. Bullets rained in the trees like the rattle of castanets, and the train, with a wounded creek, slowed to a halt.”(1950:89)

It was the author who provoked anger and fear by screaming “Bandidos”⁴⁶. We are sure that Capote was half worried, half delighted with that possibility, but, in fact, there were not bandits nor bandoleers. What happened in the sketch was something different, although equally Spanish: an old man had got on the train without paying and had finally fallen off. Soldiers fired their machine guns in order to stop the train and help the injured man. When the man recovered everybody was

⁴⁵ Truman Capote feels fascination for the trains and, in fact, he uses them as main characters of his stories. For example, in the story titled “A Tree of Night” a woman, in a similar situation, is involved into a conversation with a very strange couple who are part of a travelling show whose main attraction is that the husband is buried alive. In this case there is mystery, as always has to be in a short story, and also a frightening moment with a very curious ending.

⁴⁶ In the text the word appears in Spanish.

ready to have a little party there to celebrate it. Then, Capote, shocked and impressed from the turn of the events, decided to write this beautiful sketch.

As we mentioned previously, there have always been two visions of Spain and in this first approach to the country Capote feels attraction for the first one, for the traditional one, somehow for the dark one. Furthermore, Capote got the seed for his next visits to Spain where he would experience the second vision, more Mediterranean, calmer and brighter, where Spain would be the destiny and not only a stage on the way. A stage on the way to Tangier. On that day, they will continue their way to Algeciras and by boat they would proceed to Tangiers' port. There they were awaited by Paul Bowles and Gore Vidal, as we mentioned above.

2. THE DOGS BARK: FONTANNA VECCHIA, LOLA AND THE MUSES ARE HEARD⁴⁷

The third and the most productive trip of Truman Capote to Europe took him to Sicily and Taormina at the beginning of the fifties. While he was living this third experience, *Local Color* was published in the United States and he composed his second novel *The Grass Harp* from May 1950 to June 1951. Apart from this, the island of Sicily, and more specially, Taormina, had a special meaning for the writer, both personally and professionally. Taormina meant the reinforcement of love, the improvement in writing, the ideal place as well as the place in which to meet his mother again and represents the wish of the writer for the best state of mind and soul. Even though he was involved and centred in *The Grass Harp* he could not stop living Taormina; for this reason, not only did he finish that novel but he also had excellent memories of the island and drew three sketches about the way of living in Sicily and Taormina, "Fontana Vecchia" and a decade later "Lola" and "A House in Sicily".

2.1 FONTANA VECCHIA AND LOLA

From "Fontana Vecchia", the first one, the reader can learn the origins of Taormina. It was "an extension of Naxos, the earliest Greek city in Sicily" and "has

⁴⁷ Although *The Muses Are Heard* was published as a book in 1956, it was included together with "Fontana Vecchia" and "Lola" in *The Dogs Bark*, published in 1973. In order not to break the vision and the concept of place we are going to analyse together "Fontana Vecchia" and "Lola" and after we will deal with *The Muses Are Heard*. The edition we have used here for the commentary on these stories come from *The Dogs Bark*, 1973.

had a continuous existence since 396 B.C". We also learn that Goethe had explored the area in 1787 . In "Fontanna Vecchia" Capote quotes *Italian Journey*, Goethe's account of his trip to the country, to give a very positive perspective of the city from its theatre, affirming (1973:110) that never any audience "have before it such a spectacle as there behold. On the right, and on high rocks at the side, a castle tower in the air; further on, the city lies below you, and although all of its buildings are of a modern date, still similar ones, no doubt, stood of old on the same site. After this, the eye falls on the whole of the long range of Aetna, then on the left it catches a view of the seashore as far as Catania and even Syracuse,". This assertion corresponds to Capote's agreement when he says that "Taormina is as scenically extravagant as Goethe claims".

D.H. Lawrence's residence in Taormina was called "Fontanna Vecchia" and that was the one Truman Capote and Jack Dunphy "first leased-this was in the spring-April". At the entrance, the words "Pace and Peace" could be read carved into stone; this is a symbol of the state of mind of the writer. This place in the east part of Sicily made him feel so good and in "peace" that he writes so beautifully about it. For example, due to the proximity to "Aetna" he affirms that living in Taormina "is very like living in an airplane, or a ship, trembling on the peak of a tidal wave.... A feeling of being suspended, like the white reeling doves" (1973:105-106).

Taormina in the year 2004 is a very touristy area, much more than sixty years ago. Taormina, dominated by "Aetna volcano", is quite a mountainous place, full of steep and narrow streets conforming a very charming city. Part of the charm, and we agree with Truman Capote about it, is the "aperitif" in the Piazza enjoying its distinctive atmosphere. All of this, together with the breathtaking Greek theatre, makes of Taormina a real bohemian place and it is perfectly understood that writers could feel the place as a peaceful place for creating.

As we said before, the way of living, the character and the peculiarity of the people, the landscape, together with the attractions of its food and the problems they had to cook are the main points on this sketch. However, the text becomes much more personal when Capote (1973:107) tells us that his British friend Cecil Beaton⁴⁸ went "on a holiday... to stay with us." and even more when we know that Capote invited his mother to Europe after some disagreements and soon before her death in the month of January 1954. This is an important aspect. From the early days of his life the relationship between Lillie Mae Faulk (Capote's Mother) and her son had been very complicated and there had always been more things to separate them than to unite them. After a time of constant disagreement, Truman decided to

⁴⁸ In Beaton's biography by Hugo Vickers we are told of the two weeks Beaton spent that summer in "Truman Capote's pink house on the hills covered with olive groves." (Vickers, p. 347).

invite her to come to Europe⁴⁹. So important was Europe to him that he tried to reconstruct his relationship with his mother, trying to make another step in his “bridge to childhood”.

Finally, the writer draws the images of two important characters that he will include in other writings: on one hand, he uses for the third time in his narrative the image of the French writer Andre Gide, who was “in the last year of his life.”⁵⁰ On the other hand, he introduces and describes a kind character that will appear also in “Lola”. It is “our cook, G., who is nineteen”.⁵¹ Graziella’s stories, or G. (and probably also Gioconda as we have previously studied) continued in “Lola”, written in 1964, where the writer refers to his experiences in Taormina in 1952, in Christmas time. The first thing we learn is that they are sorry because they could not get Fontanna Vecchia leased, as they had the year before. However, he again contracted Graziella, the teenager who had come to clean the year before and with whom Capote had a nice relationship. For the writer “Whatever the weather, winter-withered or sun-scorched, the house would not have been quite habitable without Graziella, a servant girl from the village who appeared early each morning and stayed until after supper.”⁵² So nice was their relationship that the plot of the story is that Capote was given a Christmas present from Graziella: a raven.

This funny story about how the writer, who did not like birds, comes into loving a bird is also a way to give more details to the reader about the place, about Calabria, about Cape Palinuro or about the ruins at Paestrum. The story of the bird, first locked and hidden and after freed, and “her” affair with Capote’s dogs or Graziella’s engagement cover almost a year in the life of the story. Then, he finished his Taormina experience saying that “Across the straits of Messina, across Calabria, on to Naples and Rome. It is a pleasant journey to look back upon: sometimes when balanced on the edge of sleep, I see pictures of it slide past”⁵³. Both stories, “Fontanna Vecchia” and “Lola” could be two chapters of the same story linked by the main characters: the place, Graziella and the writer.

A story that had continuity in a travel he made to Taormina again in 1953, visiting also places like Paris, Ravello, Portofino⁵⁴- and later, Switzerland. At this

⁴⁹ “Touring Europe for the first time since the war, she and Joe (Capote’s stepfather) showed up at the beginning of September”. Capote’s mother wanted to “put things right.” After, from Sicily they continued on to Venice (Clarke:214-215).

⁵⁰ Clarke, pp. 211-212. Andre Gide was born in 1869 and died in 1951.

⁵¹ *The Dogs Bark*, p. 126.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 118.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 126.

⁵⁴ Vickers again reports Beaton’s stay with Capote in Portofino and in Rapallo in the summer of 1953. Although he does not describe neither the place nor the people, he makes reference to the close relationship and admiration Beaton and Capote felt for each other. (Vickers:369) Even Tennessee

time, we have to talk of a “European Truman Capote”. As we put forward, his vision of Europe is in constant mutation and always getting better, from a place in which to develop social relationships, broken and devastated by the war, full of dark and bitterness, to the cradle of his peace, the place to come back, the place where inspiration comes from, the place to remain and love, the place to discover, to experience, to live and learn⁵⁵. The seed for the birth of a new kind of writing, whose next step will be the former USSR.

2.2: THE MUSES ARE HEARD (1956)

The next step in the development and improvement of Capote’s journalistic style, the nonfiction novel, was called *The Muses Are Heard*, published in 1956, written in the Anti-Communist era in times of President Eisenhower⁵⁶. To write this book was, in the words of Kenneth T. Reed (1981:98), something “daring and revolutionary at best, subversive at worst.” In December 1955, Truman Capote and a ninety member group, most of them belonging to the Everyman Opera Company were involved in a train trip from Berlin to Moscow and Leningrad (via Warsaw) in order to present the musical *Porgy and Bess* to the Russian audience. The Leningrad Premiere would be on the 26th December 1956⁵⁷. Capote was making his final attempt to the nonfiction of *In Cold Blood*. That is the importance of Europe. Europe was the material, the training, the reportage and the seed to create. Europe was the inspiration, the experience and the art.

He would witness and report the historical fact of the representation of an American play in the former USSR, which obviously was a great experience for him, as a person and as a writer, and something transcendent for the whole world to know about; an event that meant an act of opening for the political and social system of the communist bloc (maybe for the first time) to any piece of information coming from “the other side”. The aim of Truman Capote in the story is quite clear in the next excerpt by Gerald Clarke

Williams reports Capote’s invitation to Donald Windham on a letter written on the 28th of July 1953 (Windham 280-281).

⁵⁵ Capote returned to the place he had visited in his first trip to Europe: he returned to England, France or Italy and, after, he also returned to Switzerland or Spain. The answer can be in the first words of his *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* when he affirms that “I am always drawn back to the places where I have lived”.

⁵⁶ General Eisenhower was the thirty-fourth President of the United States from 1953 to 1961.

⁵⁷ There is coincidence in time, place and events between Capote and Clarke. So, his reportage was quite meticulous, something important from the autobiographical point of view as we researched in *Ficción y Realidad en la obra de Truman Capote* (2003).

For years he wanted to test his skills at it, and now Harold Arlen suggested an almost irresistible subject. Arlen's friend Robert Breen was the director of a company, the Everyman Opera, that had performed George Gershwin's opera, around the world... Taking advantage of a thaw in the Cold War, it was going to carry the Stars and Stripes into the center of the enemy camp, becoming the first American company to perform in the Soviet Union since the Bolshevik Revolution. Truman should go along, the composer said, and write an account of the group's adventures... *The New Yorker*, which promised to publish the story he brought back, paid his expenses. (Clarke 1988: 290)

"The account of the group's adventures" was divided in two parts: the first part was titled "When the Cannons Are Silent" and there the writer reported the arrangements for the departure and the trip; the second part called "The Muses Are Heard" is where we learn about the place, the representation and the reviews. In the first part, we are told that the troupe stayed at the Hotel Kempinski in Berlin, a fine hotel next to one of the most important streets in the city, the Kurfurstendam Strasse, with its long avenues and never ending shops. Symbols, both the street and the Hotel, of the West Berlin that nowadays keeps its charm and character. However, his report starts, as the trip does, with the diplomatic "briefing" in which they are informed of the travel details.

Berlin is like a symbol. It is winter, cold, separated, divided, broken. East and West. They stayed in the West but they had to depart from the East Station. There is a small line in the book that is so ordinary to be taken into account but it is so eloquent and representative of the kind of story that Capote wants to tell us and specifically of his vision of Europe (1973:185), a line that divides his narrative and the story like a beginning and end, and it is the following: "...rumbled off through West Berlin toward the Brandenburg Gate, where the communist world begins." The image is like a train coming into a dark tunnel where nobody knows what will come up ahead. They entered an uncharted territory, "the communist world."

However, the focus of the writer, as we mentioned before, was not the place anymore; now, the center of his universe was the people. So, The Breens, the Gershwins and the rest of the troupe, the "centre of his temporal universe", embarked to Moscow on 19 December 1955, when, after the aforementioned meeting, all the members of the party were wondering about the methods and procedures of the Soviet government in relation to personal privacy in the USSR. "on the rumours that their letters would be censored, the hotel rooms wired, and the walls encrusted with cameras.", as Capote says (1973:163).

They were also worried about the cast, made up of black people and they did not have any idea how this could be taken by so close an audience. Even before they leave for the station they are told (1973:1964-1965), and this is quite interesting to complete Capote's opinion of Europe, that "you must bear in mind that their system of government is basically hostile to our own. It is a system with

rules and regulations, such as you have never experienced before.” And then we have the opinion of a member of the troupe about the Russian system, when she says that “I’m stunned, darling. Think of living like that! Always assuming, never *knowing*.”(1973:170).

As it happened in “A Ride Through Spain” the writer describes in detail the train, the carriages and the people talking there as if it were the recording of a video camera. Clarke confirms that the technique and the aim of Capote on this trip was the same as in *Local Color*. His aim was to picture whatever person as real as that of Graziella, or G, in “Fontanna Vecchia” because of his/her originality.

We agree with Gerald Clarke (1988:290-291) that his aim was only partially to make a report of the show and its impact on the Russian society

Truman was not interested in writing an account of an historic event; indeed, he was probably constitutionally incapable of such a portentous undertaking. Almost immediately, probably before *The Blue Express* had left the East Berlin station, he realized that in Breen’s history-making enterprise there was also material ideally suited to his comedian talents. Writing later, he said that he imagined *The Muses are Heard*... as a brief comic novel.

This trip was a *divertimento* for Capote’s wit. Once the train had left Berlin, the writer waltzes around the compartments of the train searching for candidates to be used as fictional characters. It is the moment when Miss Ryan, Robert Breen’s secretary, Earl Bruce Jackson and his fiancée Helen Thiepgen, both participants in the cast of the play, are introduced to the reader. Well, then, all these people and Leonard Lyons, *New York Post*’s columnist, were the center of the investigation and the irony- in a very Oscar Wilde type-; they are the main characters and the ones with whom he spent more time.

Part of the conversation that the writer uses to let the characters define themselves takes place with the train entering a snowy Warsaw.⁵⁸ The snow links the vision of Warsaw with the train entering the Russian landscape. In this sense, one can read in the book that “you are fortunate that you go to Leningrad first. A lovely city,”... “very quiet, really European, the one place in Russia I could imagine living, not that I do, but still... Yes, I like Leningrad.”⁵⁹ The so-recurrent theme of the trip in Capote’s literature gets its higher point in this book.

The second part, “The Muses are Heard”, represents the party’s arrival to the hotel in Leningrad and the amazing cultural difference the Americans experience minute after minute. The country, the city, the hotel, the rooms, the theatre, etc...,

⁵⁸ It is quite curious to note that in this reportage, so cold, so distant, so far away from the southern roots of the writer contains almost from the very beginning two of the most significant features in Capote’s literary universe: the train (present many times in his narrative, as we have said before) and the snow.

⁵⁹ *The Muses Are Heard*, p. 213.

everything is different for the troupe. The writer pays attention not only to show the amazement of the group but also to show with sarcasm their reactions when facing this communist country telling the reader his own experience and incredulity. In this sense, Gerald Clarke (1998:292) says that

Truman is also a protagonist in *The Muses Are Heard* which he wrote in first person, as he did all of his comic, sunlit works. He injects so far as to note that his presence caused stares on Soviet streets, but he leaves the reader with the impression that any American would have received the same attention.

Moscow or Leningrad in the mid-fifties did not resemble the kind of life the group had, for example, in New York and the result of that difference was the socio-cultural crash that they suffered; there were many things wrong or inadequate for a group who thought they deserved better treatment due to the fact that they were guests of the Government. The very simple fact of the distribution of the rooms in the hotel took a different perspective: relevant people of the troupe complained because in their opinion the best rooms that they were entitled to were given to members of the troupe who did not deserve as much consideration. These situations highlighted a different way of doing things and a different vision of the social matters, causing funny reactions that Capote captured. Capote takes the hand of the reader and leads him through the hotel chaos witnessing and satirizing the behaviour of the travel-mates. By chance, he finds the company of Nancy Ryan to walk across the city; meanwhile, the premiere is ready for the 26th December.

The description of the Hotel Astoria (“best hotel in Leningrad”, “Ritz of Russia”) and the posterior photographs of the streets of Leningrad have a very important place in the story because the technique that the writer uses is the same he would use if he were in Monroeville in New York or in Spain or Italy and it will be the same one, improved, developed and skilled that he will use in the book *In Cold Blood*: exhaustive landscape description, profuse description of emotions and of distinctive features, and above all, a complete and complex confection of his characters linked to an excellent use of language. In the streets of the city, Capote pays attention to two children, twins, that follow the steps of Truman Capote and Nancy Ryan. The coldness and the peculiar condition of the streets fulfil the writer’s description up to the point they discovered they are lost

We crossed the bridge and wandered through opened iron gates into deserted courtyard of a blue palace. It was the beginning of a labyrinth, an arctic Casbah where one courtyard led into another via arcades and tunnels and across narrow streets snow-hushed and silent except for sleigh horses stamping their hooves, a drifting sound of bells, an occasional giggle from the twins, still trailing behind us.

The cold was like an aesthetic; gradually I felt numb enough to undergo major surgery. But Miss Ryan refused to turn back. She said, “This is St. Petersburg, for God’s sake. We’re not just walking anywhere. I want to see as

much as I can. And I'd better. From now on, you know where I'll be? Locked in room typing a lot of nonsense for the Breens." But I saw that she couldn't last much longer, her face was drunkard-red, a frostbite spot whitened the tip of her nose. Minutes later, feeling its first sting, she was ready to seek the Astoria.

The trouble was, we were lost.⁶⁰

Before the premiere they had time to walk around the main streets of the city for shopping and sightseeing as well. Moreover, the shopping in the city, the visit to L'Hermitage or Christmas day fill the pages with a very detailed and factual explanation of the big difference between the cultures, showing uneasiness and incomprehension for their cultural and political identities. They had the opportunity to attend the representation of *Corsair*, and, little by little the day of the premiere arrived. In fact, the show is reduced to the last fifteen pages of the book. We are told of the formalities such as the national anthems and the presentation speeches as well as a translation of the plot of the musical at the beginning of every part. The reaction of the audience during and at end of the first part of the show puzzled the staff. The result of all this first part was "no applause." What the group received when the first curtain fell was "silence". They were concerned about the way that it was going to finish.

The fact was that the Russian audience was trying to understand what was happening on stage and they did not want to lose any little part of the situations represented. At the end, the audience applauded up to ten minutes and everybody was claiming that they "had made history". Somehow, Truman Capote also did it; first as a witness of a historical moment; second, as the writer of an increasingly more perfect style and third as one of the American authors who best know Europe from north to south and from east to west. Now, Capote feels like he is at home in Europe and he will come back shortly to continue experiencing the country.

In short, *The Muses Are Heard* completes the European vision of the writer. If he had started travelling to a dark and grey post-war England and he continued to a more open, still post-war, France meeting the literary society of the time and found in Italy and Spain the peace and the essence to write about the human beings and himself, in Germany and the former USSR he felt the division between the communist bloc and the rest of Europe in a deeper way. He noted the difference between the people living in different parts of the continent and, therefore, he became a sort of European reporter. Now, paying more attention to the people than to the lyric, and this will become more evident in *In Cold Blood*.

⁶⁰ *The Muses Are Heard*, p. 234-235.

3. EPILOGUE: THE MAKING OF *IN COLD BLOOD*

Breakfast at Tiffany's, written in 1958, two years after the success of *The Muses Are Heard*, is the only fictional stop from the reportage of his Russian experience to the masterpiece *In Cold Blood*. Neither the first nor the last contains more information to add to our research by themselves. However, we must mention here the making of *In Cold Blood* as the epilogue to the Capote's experience in Europe. Our research would not be accurate or complete if we did not present, as we said before, the important role that Europe, and Spain in particular, played in the construction of Capote's masterpiece.

In April 1960 (after a second trip to Russia) Truman Capote and Jack Dunphy traveled by car from Le Havre to La Costa Brava, to Playa de Aro and the small village of Palamós where they would spend some summer holidays. Some months before, in November 1959, there was a terrible crime in Holcomb, Kansas, with the killing of the Clutter family *In Cold Blood*. From that moment, and in the next six years, Capote was involved in this story like in no other. He met the family and friends of the people killed, he met the police force in charge of the investigation and followed every stage of it up to the arrest and imprisonment of the criminals. He was so involved that he became the best friend of the criminals in prison. The result of these years was anxiety, pain and suffering.

He suffered the pressure of real life on his shoulders: the pressure of being a writer, the pressure of feeling that he had something good to tell, the pressure of being conscious that the story could make him a greater novelist, the pressure of the pain of the family of the killed, the pressure of the friendship of the killers, the pressure of the end of the story -terrible in the best of ways. Then, after having suffered on his own flesh the pain of a village broken by the tragedy, the writer needs the air, the light, the peace, the blue of the sea, those so distinctive features of the coast of Spain that in a different time and in a different degree he had looked for in Italy. However, there is a big difference. In Italy, Capote was looking for a place with light to write. In Spain, he was looking for a place to organize his ideas, to escape from the most painful of the realities he had to face, to run away from an obsession, in other words, he was searching for a place to survive.

Now, this is the moment when Capote captures the second vision of Spain: the colorful, the brighter, the touching, the deeper, the purest. That light, that color that apart from some pictures of Dalí, reminds of Sorolla. In Palamós, Capote lives in three different houses in a sort of extreme quietness and relaxation. He usually divided the year between his house in Verbier, Switzerland, and Palamós. He received many visits in Palamós and we can recall here the opinion of one of his friends, Tammy Graines, who said in Plimpton's book that "here we are like in a monastery. You can't even get a drink around here!" and also Herb Caen, another

friend, insists on this idea “we wanted to go into the town to some nightclub. He didn’t. So, we sat there in the finca, which was a monastery-like place, outside Palamós.”⁶¹. In the period he spent in this small town he changed houses, always moving closer to the sea.

Spain was like medicine for Capote and contributed directly to the organization, selection and composition of the material that Truman Capote had gathered in the United States and contributed with its atmosphere, its people and its light to conduct all the energy of the writer to the positive and successful conclusion of his work. However, all this *In Cold Blood* story changed the person and the writer. The person changed friends and became even more egocentric, if that was possible; the writer became tricky, difficult and lazy, and in the next eighteen years to the end of his life he just published one original book, *Music for Chameleons*, and some short stories⁶². The investigation, the creation and the time that from the first minute he spent in the making of *In Cold Blood* changed the artist as much as it did the man. In the same direction he changed his image of Spain. In 1949, Spain was “local color”, the different, the new, the odd, the extreme, the romantic. Up to 1965, Spain is peace, the place to come back to, silence against noise. A place to calm the fiery mind he turned out to be.

The bluest waters of the Mediterranean in Palamós, the quietness of a small village in the times of Franco, the friendliness and the authenticity of the people who lived next to the writer and the chance to live away from the pressure he had in the States for his involvement in the case. The price he had to pay for the world success of the book provoked the conceit of the writer and really his self-destruction⁶³.

Even after the publication of *In Cold Blood*, Capote kept on coming to Europe for a long time: France, Portugal, Switzerland, England and the Dalmatian and the Turkish coast at the end of the sixties and England, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, etc... in the seventies, but he did not produce new writings on these experiences except the two small ones mentioned previously.

⁶¹ Plimpton, p. 280-281.

⁶² As we have just said, *The Dogs Bark* was published in 1973 but the book does not really contained new material. *Answered Prayers* was published in 1984 and was not finished. It was published posthumously.

⁶³ At the end of this research, we would like to mention two minor texts in the literary career of the writer. After the success of the *In Cold Blood*, there are two small sketches we have to talk briefly about: *Extreme Magic*, published in 1967 and *Greek Paragraphs* published in 1968. Both of them talk about cruises around the Baltic and Greek Islands. These are two small sketches that do not reach the quality of the first commented here and that they talk about the few places visited- Dubrovnik, Split, Rhodes, etc.. but not even paying this time attention to the unusual or eccentric or noticeable but just commented the life of the people on a boat.

In conclusion, we can say that every time Capote visited Europe he was more and more involved. Europe was for him the root, the story, the experience, the motive for his writings for a long period of time. Europe turned out to be very important in his private and professional life. Writing about places at the beginning in a very romantic and lyric way, he left politics away from his pages even in the most painful and decisive moments, choosing to speak about beauty and the difference in the identities of the people. Capote's vision of Europe, and its importance is that it is complete and complementary: complete, in the sense that he writes about all the parts of Europe showing through the detailed description the definition of a continent, from North to South and East and West; complementary, because it complements and enriches the worlds of other writers, American writers that wrote about Spain and focused on other topics such as the religion, the wars, the politics or the economy.

Capote's vision of Europe is personal, individual, imaginative, different, autobiographical, realistic and complete. We can say that although writing was never a peaceful experience for the writer, in Europe he could finally build that bridge to childhood he hoped to make the first time he traveled to the continent. Now, on the twentieth anniversary of his death and with his masterpiece about to be forty years, the importance of Capote's testimony lies in his peculiar and different understanding of the European identity/identities. His importance, now that the European Community has been enlarged to twenty five countries comes from the idea that Truman Capote experienced first and told after the idiosyncrasy of every European place as if it were his own hometown.

As I was saying, I learned something...I think I understood for the first time in my life that I wasn't nearly as interested in saving my *skin* as in saving what I *know*, stories I've got to tell. The thought that I'd never had the chance to tell them was worse than the idea of death itself. Oh...maybe everyone has stories to tell. What I mean is, I have something to say that hasn't been said, simply because no one else knows what I know in the *way* I know it.⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ Brinnin, p. 29-30.

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