

not in the finished *Portrait*. (It is in *Stephen Hero*, by the way, that the surname of the protagonist is spelled Daedalus!) In the Bibliography (130) the publisher and date of John R. May's *The Pruning Word* are given as Vanderbilt University Press and 1969; the correct information should be University of Notre Dame Press and 1976. Finally, "Judgement Day" appears inaccurately as "Judgment Day" in the index (134).

Despite these lapses there is much to praise in *Risen Sons*. However, I do not feel that it is of the same importance as two books which pursue the *via negativa* and flirt with the Manichean view: Asals's *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* and Martha Stephens's *The Question of Flannery O'Connor*.

Gerald Clarke

*CAPOTE: A BIOGRAPHY*

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988. Pp. 632

Reviewed by Harold E. Lusher

Truman Capote's genius for publicity, which did so much to promote and enhance both his personal life and his professional career, does not seem to have vanished with the death of the author himself. Capote died on August 25, 1984, presumably of a cardiac-rhythmic disorder induced by a drug overdose. "In the hours and days before his death he had consumed great quantities of drugs: Valium, Dilantin, Codeine, Tylenol and two or three barbiturates" (546). Since his death, however, curiosity about both his personal life and his writing continues to flourish. In response to the undiminished demand for more of his written work—unfinished or hitherto unpublished—Random House has issued *Three by Truman Capote* (1985), the extant chapters of the widely heralded *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel* (1987), and in the same year a judicious sampling of his prose in *A Capote Reader*. The increasing interest in the details of his background and private life—which, ironically, was often played out on an all too public stage—has now been satisfied by a fascinating and carefully documented account of his career: Gerald Clarke's *Capote: A Biography*.

If the task of a biographer is to give a full and faithful account of the career of an exceptional human being, Mr. Clarke has succeeded magnificently in meeting the challenge he has set himself. Although this is his first book, he learned his craft exemplarily as a senior writer for *Time* magazine, to which he still contributes from time to time. His work here is complete, without suffocating the interest of his reader in a mass of irrelevant detail; it is written with grace and clarity; and it is blessedly free of moral prejudice in its depiction of Capote's recreations and emotional involvements. The overwhelming impression that the reader is left with at the close of its 547 pages is of a biographer who clearly appreciates the person and achievement of his subject, but who is also aware of his obligation to recount as candidly as possible the self-destructive extravagances that marred and finally destroyed so promising a career.

From the early stories and novels of the late forties and fifties, Capote's literary career arguably reached its peak with the publication of "the nonfiction novel" *In Cold Blood*, which first appeared in instalments in *The New Yorker* in 1965 and in book form in early 1966. To many of his readers, his career thereafter seemed to wane in the sense he never again produced anything of comparable quantity or quality. He continued to write and publish, of course, but his later writing seemed more journalistic than genuinely creative, and prompted the unhappy suspicion that, like so many before him, he was losing his talent. Mr. Clarke corrects that impression by pointing out that the *quality* of Capote's work never declined at all. On the contrary, it became more controlled, more refined, and more masterful as he grew older. It is true that the *quantity* of his work did indeed fall off, but there were good and sufficient reasons for that turn of events: the exhaustion that overtook him after eight years of concentrated work on *In Cold Blood*; the chaotic condition of his emotional and sexual life; and the intermittent work that he did on what was supposed to be his crowning literary achievement, the novel *Answered Prayers*. Since these were also the years of his growing dependency on drugs and alcohol—the Studio 54 years, as it were—the miracle is not only that he continued writing, but that his work, in spite of his distractions, improved so visibly in the process. The collection of fugitive pieces in *Music for Chameleons*, for example, includes, according to Clarke, some of Capote's finest writing: "He had always been happiest writing short pieces, fiction and non-fiction alike, and some of the bits that followed were among the best works he was ever to produce: the years of self-abuse had not dulled his musician's ear for the rhythms and intonations of the English language. Most of the pieces were later collected in *Music for Chameleons*" (516).

Mr. Clarke's biography is based on hundreds of interviews with those who had known Capote best. More importantly, his association with Capote during the last eight years of the writer's life entailed innumerable interviews on every phase and aspect of his life. Together with its other merits, Mr. Clarke's work is therefore likely to remain the definitive account of Capote's roller-coaster career for many years to come. For scholars and literary historians, it provides a reliable account of the genesis of individual works and a record of their critical reception. Lest a reader become too overwhelmed by what might seem the gossipy nature of the narrative, he would do well to recall the gratifying praise bestowed on Capote's work by no less a literary figure than Norman Mailer, who wrote, after the appearance of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*: ". . . he is the most perfect writer of my generation, he writes the best sentences word for word, rhythm upon rhythm" (314-15). A statement by Capote himself, taken from Lawrence Grobel's *Conversations with Capote*, is quoted on the dust jacket of Mr. Clarke's biography, and is so apt that it too bears repeating here: "This man Gerald Clarke who's writing this book about me—do you know him? He's one of the lead writers at *Time* magazine. He's really a very good writer. His book, it better be fantastic, because he's worked on it for eight years. I've never known such research. This is the first book he's written. I don't want to read it, but he certainly knows more about me than anybody else, including myself."