

Answered Prayers – 1975

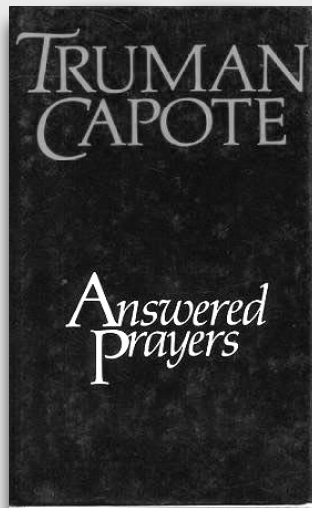
Through his jet set social life Capote had been gathering observations for a tell-all novel, *Answered Prayers*. The book, which had been in the planning stages since 1958, was intended to be the American equivalent of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Initially scheduled for publication in 1968, the novel was eventually delayed, at Capote's insistence, to 1972. Capote spoke about the novel in interviews, but continued to postpone the delivery date.

Capote permitted *Esquire* to publish four chapters of the unfinished novel in 1975 and 1976. The first chapter was favorably received, but the second, "La Côte Basque 1965", based on the dysfunctional personal lives of Capote's closest friends, generated controversy. The issue sold out immediately upon publication, its much-discussed betrayal of confidences alienated Capote from his established base of middle-aged, wealthy female friends, who feared the intimate and often sordid details of their ostensibly glamorous lives would be exposed to the public.

Truman's decline is usually blamed on the debacle caused by "La Côte Basque 1965," but biographer Gerald Clarke believes the seeds of his self-destruction were planted much earlier, when he was researching *In Cold Blood*. He'd gotten close to Perry Smith during those five long years of visiting him in a bleak Kansas prison and then waiting for him to be executed. "There was a psychological connection between the two of them," Clarke believes. "Perry's death took it out of him." But Truman knew that the value of *In Cold Blood* "required the execution to take place." He couldn't finish his book otherwise. "He wrote that he wanted them to die—that started the decline."

Per Clarke, "I was reading the chapters while Truman was floating in the pool on a raft. I said, 'People aren't going to be happy with this, Truman.' He said, 'Nah, they're too dumb. They won't know who they are.' He could not have been more wrong."

"I wonder whether he wasn't testing the love of his friends, to see what he could get away with. We had Truman around because he paid for his supper," friend John Richardson says, "by being the great storyteller in the marketplace of Marrakech. Truman was a brilliant raconteur...one story after another. And he loved doing it—he was a show-off. It was offensive – but it was rather brilliantly done – shit served up on a gold dish."



John Barry Ryan

"How could Truman turn on these people who befriended him? That is sheer unadulterated bullshit. The people who had Truman around had him because he was entertaining, great company, loved the life that they lived and brought fresh zest to it that they had long since lost by virtue of overindulgence...the people who entertained Truman, who shared their innermost secrets with him, who used him as their therapist, their court jester...surprised that Truman's indiscretion might extend to publicly revealing their indiscretions I have found astonishing. The people who after 'befriending' accepting this asp onto their bosoms, were surprised that the snake bit! Everyone who was exposed to him knew that if you told Truman something, it was the equivalent of telling 40 other people."

Alan Schwartz

About the missing chapters and manuscript "At one point, Truman said that John O'Shea (a lover with whom Truman had a tempestuous affair – meanwhile befriending O'Shea's wife and children) had it... and had stolen it...he persuaded me and everyone else that they were in the trunk of O'Shea's car..in the midst of this Truman arranged to blow up John O'Shea's car..."

Gerald Clarke

"Why might O'Shea have done it? To get money out of Truman, possibly, or he might have done it just to get back at Truman – for spite."

Andreas Brown

"There are three possibilities that I can think of regarding the alleged missing manuscript of *Answered Prayers*: (1) Capote never wrote them, (2) Capote wrote them but destroyed them himself because he wasn't satisfied with them, (3) Capote wrote them and somebody took them. He admitted writing much of the later drafts of *Answered Prayers* during some of his most serious drug and alcohol problems and the quality was probably rather uneven. I lean toward the suspicion that Capote destroyed them himself...He was known to have destroyed major manuscripts early on in his career."