CHAPTER 4

CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL MINDS IN TRUMAN CAPOTE’S IN COLD BLOOD, NORMAN MAILER’S THE EXECUTIONER’S SONG AND DON DELILLO’S LIBRA

Post-World War II non-fictional literature included many authors who began as fiction writers but later made successful attempts at writing real life narratives. This gradually led to the blurring of boundaries between the genres of literature and journalistic writing as well as fiction and non-fiction in a number of works. James N. Stull argues that this development is an expression of the post-war writers’ desire to define the world around them and their own place in it (54). Moreover, there was a boom of true crime novels at that time. This chapter focuses on Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood (1966) subtitled ‘A True account of multiple murder and its consequences,’ Norman Mailer’s The Executioner’s Song: ‘A True Life Novel’ (1979) and Don DeLillo’s Libra (1988), being the popular texts dealing with the highly sensational theme of murder and true crime.

These works of art have marked a watershed in contemporary American literature in their attempt to mingle factual reportage with novelistic style. They are enriched with an extensive research of the criminal minds and their backgrounds. Authors in these texts use actual crimes and real criminals. They can be fairly factual or highly speculative and heavily fictionalized. Some works are written as “instant books” so as to capitalize on popular demand while others reflect years of thoughtful research and inquiry. It is a distinct feature of the modern genre, focusing on murders, to highlight the biographical treatment of criminals and victims. It attempts to explain criminal psychology, and descriptions of police investigations and trial procedures in narrative form.
In narratives different views about elements like narrator, plot, description, and characters given by different theorists, are so closely intertwined that one can never be studied in isolation. It is only through comparative analysis of narratives that one can find convergences and divergences. The main theme dealt with in *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner’s Song* is the multiple murders, and the subsequent execution of the murderers. *Libra* deals with the basic themes of conspiracy related to the assassination of the American President, John F. Kennedy, by Lee Harvey Oswald, and the role of the media in highlighting this contemporary event. Various elements of narratology have been used for better understanding these themes.

As an example of novel-length case studies of the journalistic fiction genre, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood (ICB)* could not be ignored. Capote calls his work the first of its kind: a “true account of a multiple murder and its consequences” that is not only factual, but also interesting to read. This novel has combined the awesome power of truth with the techniques of fiction writing and is an attempt at creating a genre that can accomplish more than either fiction or nonfiction could accomplish independently. This chapter aims to study Capote’s use of simple journalistic techniques in his dialogue, selection of description, choice of detail, and his use of symbols, along with his most prominent technique of omniscient narrator’s perspective in *In Cold Blood*. In his biography, *Truman Capote*, Gerald Clarke quotes Capote as saying:

> Journalism always moves along a horizontal plane, telling a story, while fiction-good fiction-moves vertically, taking you deeper and deeper into characters and events. By treating a real event with fictional techniques (something that cannot be done by a journalist until he learns to write good fiction), it’s possible to make a kind of synthesis. (qtd. in Hamilton 3)
The assembling of ideas, organization of thoughts and events, and the order in which a character’s perspective is included and events unfold, are all key parts of a narrative structure. Capote had thought of writing a book incorporating novelistic techniques in a nonfiction narrative for several years before the Clutter murders. He claimed that even from the time he began writing professionally, it seemed to him that “reportage could be forced to yield a serious new art form: the ‘nonfiction novel’” and that “journalism is the most underestimated, the least explored of literary mediums” (qtd. in Plimpton, The Story 2). Capote felt that journalism was unable to accurately articulate truth on the specific scale, so he turned to literature to find some meaning in these murders on an artistic as well as universal level. Clarke also observes about Capote: ‘Another writer might have laid emphasis on Holcomb’s small-town closeness and the warmth and good-heartedness of its citizens. Truman chooses instead to pick up a thread from his fiction and to dwell on its isolation’ (Clarke 358). In In Cold Blood, Capote was attracted to the story of crime and also the area and people.

In Cold Blood, on its release in January of 1966, became an immediate international bestseller. Earlier, it had appeared in installments in The New Yorker magazine in the September and October issues of 1965. Sale of these issues broke all records for the magazine. Readers were mesmerized, in spite of the fact that there were no surprises. Through painstaking accumulation of minutiae, In Cold Blood agonizingly anatomized a multiple murder, and in the process brought literary life to six dead people. They were the four members of the prosperous Clutter family of Holcomb, Kansas, and their killers, Perry Edward Smith and Dick Richard Hickock, who were executed in 1965.

In Cold Blood begins with a glimpse of the Western Kansas landscape, its stark beauty and remoteness. Capote gives a description of Herbert Clutter, who was quite intelligent,
organized, and efficient. He had progressive ideas, and had amassed a tidy fortune in an honest way by toiling hard and using his wits. Capote shifts back and forth from the Clutters to the killers as the climax builds up towards the terrible November night in 1959 when the murders took place. Herbert Clutter’s family included good looking children, each with a definite and interesting personality, Nancy being loved by everyone; Kenyon is smart, but an introvert. Bonnie is the matriarch of the family. Capote introduces the entire Clutter family and provides a layout of the Clutter home place. Other important characters are Susan Kidwell, Nancy’s best friend, who would be the first to find the Clutters’ bodies, and Bobby Rupp is Nancy’s boyfriend, who was the last to see them alive on Saturday night. Then Capote shifts to the killers, Perry Edward Smith and Dick Hickock, who were occupied with their terrible plans. Capote unveils the killers, who are as opposite of the Clutters as persons could be. They have chaotic lives because of the scattered families that they had abandoned.

*In Cold Blood* was a literary sensation both critically and commercially. Because of its overwhelming success it was translated into twenty five foreign languages and even made into popular and highly regarded films, *Capote* (2005) and *Infamous* (2006, an American drama film). *Capote* is a 2005 biographical film about Truman Capote, following the events during the writing of Capote’s non-fiction book *In Cold Blood*. Philip Seymour Hoffman won several awards, including the Academy Award for Best Actor, for his critically acclaimed portrayal of the title role. The movie was based on Gerald Clarke’s biography *Capote*. *Infamous* covers the period from the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, during which Truman Capote researched and wrote his bestseller *In Cold Blood*, a subject which was covered a year earlier in the film *Capote*. In comparing *Infamous* to *Capote*, David Thomson of *The Independent Review* asked, “What does it have that’s different? … [It] has a gallery of Truman Capote’s Manhattan friends, people
who adored him without ever quite trusting him …. These cameos give a tone-perfect sense of Capote’s life before In Cold Blood. He is placed as the phenomenon of culture, celebrity and outrage that he was.”

Capote highly relied upon his memory so as to take notes of interviews afterwards. Because of this people doubted the authenticity of the information provided. Capote had investigated extensively the lives of both victims, killers as well as the crime. He met a number of murderers to gain a better understanding of the criminal mentality. Capote described his work to be an imaginative narrative reporting, new both to journalism and to fiction (Garson, Truman Capote 143). The narrative read “like a novel” largely because of the use of scene-by-scene reconstruction instead of historical narration, the ironic heightening of dialogue, and the skillful manipulation of point of view (Hollowell 70). He chose the scenes and conversations with the most powerful dramatic appeal.

In this rigorous research, Capote was also accompanied by his childhood friend, Nelle Harper Lee, an author and research assistant. Regarding the research Capote conducted, he tells, ‘to train myself, for the purpose of this sort of book, to transcribe conversations without using a tape recorder …. After doing these exercises for a year and a half, for a couple of hours a day, I could get within 95 percent accuracy, which is as close as you need’ (qtd. in Plimpton, Truman Capote 202). He had to “relive the experience with the participants in order to acquire the necessary depth of perception” (Nance 169). He spent a lot of time with both the criminals, especially with Perry. Capote traced the entire escape route that Smith and Hickock had taken in the six weeks following the Clutter massacre, driving from Miami to Acapulco. He compiled “six thousand pages of notes and an accumulation of boxed and filed documents bulky enough to fill a small room to the ceiling” (ICB 176). With the execution, the story had reached its climax.
Capote finished writing and published the results of his labor in four successive issues of *New Yorker*, September 25 through October 16, 1965. In 1966, the material was gathered together in book form. Whatever Capote thought he was attempting to do, he did not believe he was describing a “contemporary reality invested with fictive power” (Zavarzadeh 222).

*In Cold Blood* also won the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America in 1966. The public embraced this book enthusiastically. It depicts that the writer must balance the occasionally competing claims of aesthetics and ethics, blending factual accuracy with artistic expression without damaging either. *In Cold Blood* represents a change in point-of-view that grows stronger throughout Capote’s career: “[Capote] had gradually shifted … from the role of protagonist to that of a highly detached narrator. He had moved from a private dream world to one that was identifiable, topical, even journalistic” (Nance 124).

Quite similar to *In Cold Blood*, *The Executioner’s Song* (1978) by Norman Mailer depicts the events surrounding the execution of Gary Gilmore by the state of Utah for the murder of two innocent people. It is a 1980 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that presented the criminal life of Gary Gilmore and the resulting execution which was the first in America since the *Furman v. Georgia* decision. The book is an account of the last nine months in the life of Gary Gilmore, representing the period between the day in April of 1976 when he was released from the United States Penitentiary at Marion, Illinois, and the morning in January of 1977 on which he was executed by having four shots fired into his heart in the Utah State Prison at Point of the Mountain, Utah. The title of the book may be from a play on “The Lord High Executioner’s Song” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*. “The Executioner’s Song” is also the title of one of Mailer’s earlier poems, published in *Fuck You* magazine in September 1964 and reprinted in *Cannibals and Christians* (1966). Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* has also been made into a famous film, *The*
*Executioner’s Song* in 1982. The film is directed by Lawrence Schiller. Tommy Lee Jones won an Emmy Award for his searing performance as wanton killer, Gary Gilmore, in this film. Like *In Cold Blood* and *Libra*, it is a novel which takes for its incidents and characters real events from the lives of real people.

The narrative begins when Gary Gilmore is paroled after having spent eighteen years behind the bars. He settles down in Provo, among relatives, who help him live a normal life. But he rebels and his rebellion is initially socially acceptable as he indulges in petty crimes like stealing, fighting, excessive drinking. He wrestles, brags about stabbing a black man and picks fights that become increasingly brutal. He even attempts to kill Pete Galovan, because Pete accuses him of fostering unacceptable sexual impulses when he befriends a teenage girl. Then finally he kills two residents of Provo: Max Jenson (service station attendant) and Bennie Bushnell (motel clerk) on July 19, 1976. He is arrested on July 21, 1976 and sentenced to death, but in response he demands that the sentence be carried out. He refuses to cooperate in any attempt to appeal his death penalty sentence and even challenges the system to put actions to their words. He opens up the flood gates for implementation of death penalty in the decades that were to follow. *The Executioner’s Song* captures the life of a man determined to murder, and to eventually demand the end of his life.

Don DeLillo’s *Libra*, named after the astrological sign symbolizing balance and harmony, became a high hit, making *New York Times* Best-seller list in the summer of 1988, and was also chosen as a main selection by the Book-of-the-month Club. It also won the Irish Times-Aer Lindus International Fiction Prize and was nominated for the American Book Award. It recreates the traumatic moment in Dallas, the “seven seconds that broke the backbone of the American century” (*Libra* 181). It is “a work of the imagination” based on the real life of Lee
Harvey Oswald, the events surrounding America’s 35th President, John F. Kennedy’s assassination on 22nd Nov 1963 in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, and thereafter the murder of Oswald by Jack Ruby. *Libra* is also “a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities, by the tide of speculation that widen with the years” (*Libra* 458). The Kennedy assassination by Oswald is an event that has generated an astounding amount of conspiracy theories. Oswald died when on 24th Nov’ 1963, he was being led through the basement of Dallas Police Headquarters to be transferred to the County Jail, when a Dallas club operator, Jack Ruby shot Oswald.

*Libra* ‘is meant to suggest how uncertain “reality” becomes as a result of the media’s penetration of life’ (Douglas Keesey 10). Oswald killed Kennedy in anticipation of the attention he would receive from television and press. Actually by making such sensations out of men who commit violence, like Gilmore in *The Executioner’s Song*, Perry and Dick in *In Cold Blood*, and Oswald in *Libra*, the media encourage others to take the same route to fame. In many ways, the Kennedy assassination can be defined as a postmodern event, an occurrence that has defied closure by generating a mass amount of data without a narrative to structure it. The search for “truth” has left us with a profusion of literature espousing conflicting versions of what might have happened. Apart from *Libra*, the same facts also became the background of Oliver Stone’s film *JFK* (1991) and two of the famous novels, namely James Ellroy’s crime fiction novel *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001) and *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (2007) by attorney Vincent Bugliosi.

In an interview, DeLillo says, “fiction rescues history from its confusions” by providing “a hint of order in the midst of all the randomness” (DeCurtis 294). In other words, fiction can provide comfort through narrative structuring and closure. *Libra* has provided this comfort in
that it has structured an event that otherwise seemed to defy structuring, and given an ending to
an event that otherwise seems to defy endings. History too can provide the comfort of narrative
structuring if it applies literary techniques, but it cannot provide any final answers, as it claims to
do. *Libra* emphasizes the importance of narrative for making sense of historical events.

*Libra* was Oswald’s sun-sign, and through the author’s masterly treatment, it serves to
symbolize Oswald’s precarious search for balance in American society, a search that ends with a
tilting of the scales towards excess and destruction. The book begins with Lee Oswald as a boy
in Bronx who is a misfit and a chronic truant. Then there’s a brief intermission of a glimpse into
the book-filled, document-choked study room of Nicholas Branch, who is writing a secret history
of the assassination of President Kennedy. David Cowart in *Don DeLillo: The Physics of
Language*, writes that the Kennedy assassination has been read as “the first postmodern historical
event” that “changed America, put an end to its innocent conviction of invincibility, give birth to
the culture of paranoia” (2002: 95). It is followed by an introduction of Win Everett, a C.I.A.
man semiretired, so-called, on account of his overzealousness in the matter of Cuba. In April
1963, we find Everett framing his plan for an “electrifying event” that will bring the anti-Castro
movement back to life. This novel (like the other two under study in this chapter) blends
historical fact (the events in Dallas in 1963) and fiction (the details of the plot to scare the
President into attacking Cuba). The real-life characters intermingle with DeLillo’s own creations.

The narrative structure in *In Cold Blood* was well chosen from both journalistic and
artistic point of view. It is written in small sections. The abrupt scene-shifting often has the effect
of an up-to-the-minute news bulletin. The most obvious advantage of vignette structure,
cinematic or not, is the way it enables Capote (also Mailer and DeLillo) to reinforce the contrast
between victims and killers by repeated jolts from one group to the other, especially in the
section preceding the murders. By doing so, both groups are fully introduced to the reader and character development is presented at the same pace. By allowing the reader arbitrary a piece of information, Capote foreshadows the eventual meeting of Mr. Clutter and Perry Smith, who are the main protagonists.

*In Cold Blood* is a narrative divided into four parts. First, ‘The Last to See Them Alive,’ describing the scenery of Holcomb in Kansas, characters like the Clutter family (the victims), Bobby Rupp, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, and the murder of all the members of Clutter family; second, ‘Persons Unknown,’ showing the beginning of the hunt for the killers, going into the past for studying the backgrounds of the criminal minds; third, ‘Answers,’ about confession by murderers and uncovering the details of the murder; and lastly, ‘The Corner,’ which is named after the prison in which these murderers were kept during the trial and the execution. These headings, like the title of the book itself, have a journalistic flavour and are, indeed, taken from verbal matrix of the content rather than from Capote’s imagination.

Order is the relationship between the sequence of events in the story and their arrangement. The narrator may choose to present the events in the order in which they occurred. It can be either *analepsis* or flashback (introduction into the narrative of material that happened earlier in the story) or *prolepsis* or flash-forward (introduction into the narrative of material that comes later in the story). *Analepsis* is more prominent in the texts under study. In chapter II, the author takes the reader back to the past lives of Dick and Perry, showing in detail the kind of childhood they had gone through. As Capote’s book was constructed cinematically, with swift cuts from the killers, to the family, to the police, flashbacks from the trial to the crime itself, so *prolepsis* is rarely visible in these texts. Instead Capote uses the technique of foreshadowing to infuse meaning into the real life facts and actions, and also to strengthen the theme of death. This
technique is seen in part one, where Capote repeatedly foreshadows the Clutters’ imminent
deaths: ‘[t]hen, touching the brim of his cap, he headed for home and day’s work, unaware that it
would be his last’ (ICB 13) and ‘she set out the clothes she intended to wear to church the next
morning: nylons, black pumps, a red velveteen dress- her prettiest, which she herself made. It
was the dress in which she was to be buried’ (Ibid. 56).

*In Cold Blood*’s plot is a subject that deserves discussion. The novel is not written in
complete chronological order as Capote refers to events taking place before the date on which
the novel begins. Like Capote discusses occurrences in the killers’ childhood after the murder
has taken place. These out of place events supply the novel with a nice flow making them more
interesting. References to past events help the reader to more easily comprehend the sometimes
complex storyline. The way in which Capote relays key happenings in the novel is interesting.
For example, the first time the reader is informed of how the Clutters are murdered is after the
criminals are detained.

*The Executioner’s Song*, on the other hand, is an extremely long, complex and
fragmented narrative, involving different voices and conflicting viewpoints upon the subject
matter. Mailer makes use of mosaic structure and multiple scenes. Mailer structures it into two
halves i.e. Book I, “Western Voices” and Book II, “Eastern Voices.” “Western Voices” is a kind
of mythical narrative of the romantic west as presented through effectively simplified figuration
and rhetoric. Apart from introducing the novel with a very brief one page long reminiscence of
Gary from childhood by Gary’s cousin Brenda, Mailer initiates his story when Gary is released
on parole from a prior robbery charge, and is returning to the city of Provo to start afresh.

The first tenth of 1075-page novel is dedicated to Gary’s attempts and consequent failure
to adjust in the society of his new hometown: one chapter is devoted to a brief retrospective
followed by a thorough description of Gary from Brenda’s point of view, succeeding with one self-reflective chapter about Nicole (Gary’s Girlfriend). A major part of the first half deals with the encounter and resultant relationship between Gary and Nicole. In the next two hundred pages Mailer briefly accounts for the murders followed by Gary’s apprehension and arrest. Gary’s time in prison, before and during his trial, is based on the letters he sent to Nicole. The remaining parts of the book introduce Mailer’s ambitious reconstruction of the trial process. The “Eastern Voices” part of the novel throws light on the exploding media attention following Gary’s decision to be executed and the ensuing trial. This structural technique creates for us the character of the convicted murderer, Gary Gilmore, dramatically, and is cumulatively effective.

Indeed the two works, *The Executioner’s Song* and *In Cold Blood*, highlight the attempts made by novelists to investigate the details of brutal murders, and document the events surrounding the crime. But Mailer’s work differs from *In Cold Blood* in that Mailer, unlike Capote, focuses much more on criminals than he does on victims. According to literary critic, Mark Edmundson, Mailer’s scant treatment of Gilmore’s victims reveals a bias in his work. Edmundson contends that Mailer “… makes [Jensen and Bushnell] seem small. They don’t rate the tragic themes that Gary… get[s]” (ES 442). While Capote’s *In Cold Blood* was catalogued under the Dewey Decimal System as a “Homicide Criminology,” *The Executioner’s Song* was listed under “Fiction” (Kellman 127). In her 1996 dissertation, “Courtroom as Forum,” Ann Algeo asserts that the text is somewhere in between fiction and non-fiction and furthermore, that, “… all descriptions of trial proceedings are fictional whether completely imaginary or based on personal observation, trial transcripts, or newspaper accounts” (3).

*Libra* is not as lengthy as *The Executioner’s Song*, but divided into twenty-four chapters, of which half tell the story of Lee Harvey Oswald’s life between 1956 and 1963. The chapters
are entitled after the places where he spent these seven years. The remaining chapters cover the plot for assassination of John F. Kennedy, the then President of America, and are named after the dates that mark its development between April and November 1963. A temporal gap inevitably occurs between the two narrative strands that run parallel to each other, but is eventually bridged, as Oswald comes into contact with the conspirators in April 1963.

The first two chapters and the titles they bear are significant for both the content and narrative strategy of the book. Content wise the first chapter, ‘In the Bronx,’ clearly points to Lee Harvey Oswald as the protagonist of the novel, and to his status of a misfit, a figure of the underworld riding the subway daily in an attempt to meet other lonely frustrated people. The second chapter, ‘17April,’ throws light on the main reason why Kennedy was killed, showing that it was Kennedy’s failure to make amends for the Bay of Pigs Invasion of April 17th, 1961, which resulted in what was probably one of the greatest embarrassments of US foreign policy. These two chapters seem to make of *Libra* another novel with multiple beginnings. However, as the reading advances and the plot unfolds the two beginnings converge, towards the end, in a story that defies ultimate closure and invites the reader to re-think and look for further meaning.

In *Libra*, the assassination scene as a whole is not so much DeLillo’s fictional creation as it is his “meta-representation” constructed on the basis of existing representations and documentary evidences. It is an aesthetically complex blurring of fact and fiction. Oswald is a biographical subject and as a human being almost disappears in DeLillo’s complex, ultimately textual “conspiracy metanarrative,” in which he becomes “a shadowy figure who lurks in the high window of a book depository, literally and figuratively surrounded by texts” (Kerner 2001: 97, 103). For Stephan Baker, “in a sense, *Libra* is full of authors” (2000: 100). The metanarrative
and “mirror plot” structure of *Libra*, therefore, places Oswald among those representations that have actually been produced after the event, in the fictional world of the novel.

Oswald’s biography runs parallel to the former CIA agent Win Everett’s attempt at “devising a general shape, a life” and constructing “a fiction” or “a plot” about Oswald from various materials, or that “the life of Lee H. Oswald” and “the conspiracy to kill the president” are “two parallel lives” in the mind of the notorious Davis Ferrie (*Libra* 1988: 50, 221, 339). Everett (a fictional character) and Ferrie (a real one) are constructing their plots concerning Oswald and the assassination, making DeLillo’s combination of imagination and documentaries extend fruitfully not only to the material, but also to its narrative structuring. DeLillo’s vision is closer to actual happenings and the conspiracy, of which Oswald was a part.

Oswald reappears as a high school dropout in New Orleans, as a marine at a U-2 base in Japan, as a factory worker in Russia, and finally as an order filler at the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas. Win Everett is shown surrounded by two former colleagues he trusts most and then other men less predictable, less controllable, as his plan takes on a life of its own. Nicholas Branch is seen sinking ever deeper in a morass of eyewitness accounts, hair samples, chemical analyses, then the accounts of dreams of eyewitnesses and then 25 years of novels, plays, and radio debates about the assassination. DeLillo reveals his genius by using the same source materials available to anyone else - the Warren Commission report, the usual newspaper articles, and court proceedings. Zapruder film, an important source of information, is a silent, colour motion picture sequence shot by private citizen Abraham Zapruder, as President Kennedy’s motorcade passed through Dealey Plaza in Dallas on Nov 22’ 1963, unexpectedly capturing the President’s assassination. It gave the clearest view and was an important part of the Warren Commission hearings, and the most studied pieces of films in history. DeLillo weaves all
these sources into something altogether new, largely by means of inventing, with what seems to be an uncanny perception, and the interior voice that each character might use to describe his own activities. Here, for instance, is a summary of Jack Ruby’s movements just before he killed Oswald - a matter of public record, no doubt, but the passage displays a vitality of its own:

He was running late. If I don’t get there in time, it’s decreed I wasn’t meant to do it. He drove through Dealey Plaza, slightly out of the way, to look at the wreaths again. He talked to [his dog] Sheba about was she hungry, did she want her Alpo. He parked in a lot across the street from the Western Union office. He opened the trunk, got out the dog food and a can opener and fixed the dog her meal, which he left on the front seat. He took two thousand dollars out of the moneybag and stuffed it in his pockets because this is how a club owner walks into a room. He put the gun in his right hip pocket. His name was stamped in gold inside his hat. (Libra 263)

The book is so seamlessly written that it is not merely lifelike but also, in the best sense, novel like. It narrates a story in a skillful manner, with much attention to character. DeLillo makes us familiar with some peculiar habits of the characters. Like Everett cannot make himself go to bed at night without checking that the oven is off, and then sometimes double-checking, and reminding himself as he climbs the stairs that he has in fact completed his check. No doubt DeLillo has chosen such a sensitive theme, that of the assassination of Kennedy, yet he hardly draws out the portrait of John F. Kennedy, the victim. This is because he is aware that most of the readers are already familiar with him. But he constructs a complex and convincing Oswald, rendering him as a “type” we’ve seen before. For instance, he wants desperately to change the
world, but he can’t hold a job. He seeks a utopian society of decency and equality, yet he beats his wife.

DeLillo feels that the events sometimes control life, and fate takes over from the chaotic intentions of all the characters involved. He writes:

> Plots carry their own logic. There is a tendency of plots to move towards death. He believed that the idea of death is woven into the nature of every plot. A narrative plot is no less than a conspiracy of armed men. The tighter the plot of a story, the more likely it will come to death. A plot in fiction, he believed, is the way we localize the force of death outside the body, play it off, contain it. The ancients staged mock battles to parallel the tempests in nature and reduce their fear of gods who warred against the sky. He worried about the deathward logic of his plot. (*Libra* 221)

In this narrative there are flashes back and forth in time, and jump cuts between the conspirators and Oswald, who is growing up to become exactly the kind of person the CIA renegades had planned to invent: a malcontent and misfit with a known fondness for Castro and guns. Slowly, dimly, Oswald begins to realize that he is being watched, and that people have designs on his destiny.

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt feels that *Libra* starts with less energy, but gradually gains momentum like thunder. The novel works so powerfully because of ‘the seamlessness it creates between the known and unknown, between the actual record and what Mr. DeLillo has invented’ (*Contemporary Literary Criticism* 1989: 86). Two threads which knit the facts together are the character of Oswald and the conspiracy theory. Robert Towers also finds that there are two plots that follow each other, the plot of the novel itself and the plot of the conspirators. DeLillo
employs rapid shifts of scene and voice, creating the novelistic equivalent of the sixties European films by Godard or Antonioni, although without Antonioni’s loose ends (Ibid. 90). But the jumps and cuts are so much that one hardly has time to become absorbed in a particular scene before there is a sudden cut to a very different, equally unexpected scene. This results in a fragmentation of attention and sheer confusion to comprehend what is actually happening.

In an eloquent author’s concluding note DeLillo throws light on the truthfulness of the literature in Libra: Libra is “a work of the imagination” that to many seem “one more gloom in a chronicle of unknowing.” He also adds, “because this book makes no claim to literal truth, because it is only itself, apart and complete, readers may find refuge here -a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities, by the tide of speculation that widens with the years” (Libra, Author’s Note). For Anne Tyler, Libra is the richest novel being most complicated, with dual state of characters and a plot line that might be described as herringbone-shaped (Contemporary Literary Criticism 1989: 86). Most of the events depicted are unrelated, but have been channeled together very effectively.

In simple words, the killing of Kennedy is the work of assorted anti-Castro activists who, by disguising it as a Cuban-backed effort, hope to provoke an American response more concerted and effective than the Bay of Pigs venture. But Eder writes that DeLillo not putting all this simply disassembles his plots with the finest of jigsaw cuts, scrambles the order about their missions. The chronology goes back and forth, disorienting us (Ibid. 89). This novel uses real names and repeatedly anchors itself in recorded fact because of fast-paced, fragmented presentations and continuous expansion upon the implications of his themes, DeLillo has been known for deemphasizing plot, and so critics place him with John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and Kurt Vonnegut.
Moving further, the study of point of view is another method of reaching into the depths of a narrative and to follow the author’s aim in writing a text. *In Cold Blood* is told from two alternating perspectives, that of the Clutter family who are the victims, and that of the two murderers, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. It is believed that Capote presents them without bias. But Perry Edward Smith is Capote’s primary focus throughout his six year coverage of the murder investigation, and the story is consumed by this infatuation. Capote strongly identifies himself with Perry, and seeing himself in the protagonist, presents him as George Plimpton writes, “with deeply dimensional sympathy” (Plimpton). A childhood friend of Hersey, author and research assistant, Nelle Harper lee, relates how Capote could not keep from seeing himself in one of his own protagonists- Perry Smith. Lee relates: “Perry was a killer, but there was something touching about him. I think every time Truman looked at Perry he saw his own childhood” (qtd. by Matthew Ricketson).

Both men’s (Capote and Perry) early years were nomadic: estranged from their fathers, neglected by their mothers, filled with a “primal hunger” to escape “poverty and obscurity,” both possessing talents that “went unrecognized and therefore unencouraged” (McAleer). Not only is Capote and Perry’s writing style similar, so is their structuring. Perry’s first sentence ends at his birthplace in “Hunting, Elko Count, Nevada … situated way out in the boon docks, so to speak” (273). Capote begins his testament with, “Holcomb … western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call ‘out there’” (3). Both have highlighted the desolate environments of their areas. Perry even wrote him a ten thousand word farewell letter and kissed him goodbye before being hanged. It was also true that Capote gave him a lot of attention. Through his protagonist, the killers, Capote incorporates the reader in their lives at a level of comparison and sympathy, which when they don’t get, leads to the circumstances which give birth to tragedy.
Capote masterfully utilizes the third person omniscient point of view to express the two perspectives. The text of *In Cold Blood* offers the reader a Capote absent from the narrative, eliminating all presence of the first person i.e. “me” or an “I” from the text. The non-chronological sequencing of some events emphasizes key scenes. The victims, the murderers, the victims, the murderers-- this is the way the plot moves in more than the first half of *In Cold Blood*. Though an alternating perspective is used, yet the reader is able to assimilate both sides of the story. In part one, for example, “Nancy and her music tutee, Jolene Katz, were also satisfied ...” (24), whereas the next section begins “The two young men [Dick and Perry] had little in common, but they did not realize it, for they shared a number of surface traits” (30).

Capote is not judgmental for two reasons: it is important for the reader to draw conclusions about the “philosophical-sociological-psychological circumstances of the mass murder,” and Capote concluded that there should be no interference with the readers’ judgmental process (Reed 107). The narrator, up to the criminals’ day of execution, shows no bias whatsoever. For example, about the death sentence, Capote writes, “In March 1965, after [Perry] Smith and [Dick] Hickock had been confined in their death row cells almost two thousand days, the Kansas Supreme Court decreed that their lives must end between midnight and 2:00 A.M., Wednesday, April 14, 1965” (*ICB* 336). Being of the genre of journalistic fiction, and so as to fulfill the condition of objectivity, the perspective of *In Cold Blood* is also in a way complicated. David Guest claims that “there are no direct references to Capote in the narrative” (Guest 118).

Capote uses his power as the undetectable storyteller, mostly remaining unnamed while intermittently slipping into different characters’ minds, and adding what he himself calls “the reality and the atmosphere of a novel” (Inge 120). This insight humanizes the killers. He chooses to give readers the inner dialogue at this point of the novel, when they are struggling to
understand their crimes, rather than when they “couldn’t stop laughing” when they “hit the highway and drove east” immediately after leaving the Clutters’ house, which Capote does not reveal until two hundred pages after the murder (256). If Capote had dropped his narrator’s voice and entered the minds of the killers in that disgusting moment when they acted savagely, readers would have known much sooner how the excited killers felt “very high” from the murders (256). Instead, after the pages in which the search for the killers begins, the author immediately skips to Mexico, where they have been planning the crime for days and can receive more sympathy from the reader.

In *The Executioner’s Song*, Mailer’s personal voice and language is flat and banal, being radically different from that of the earlier Mailer. The characteristic style and rhetoric of Mailer here becomes more a voice and style of “recording.” The author’s function appears to be limited to a purely technical gathering of documentary material, and the narrative as a whole sustains an illusion that the story is being told by the people who know Gilmore.

Mailer truly views Gary Gilmore as a self-confident man. When Gilmore is re-introduced to his cousin Brenda in the beginning of the novel, the narrator immediately compares him to a bear (12). His strength is incredible to his cousin, whom, even her husband “had never gripped Brenda that hard” (12). Sometimes Mailer bluntly states that Gilmore is “always so manly” (235). In order to tell many sides of the story, Mailer writes with multiple perspectives, adding the opinions of those he interviewed to his narrator’s opinions.

‘Western Voices’ is narrated from the point of view of secondary characters in Gary’s surroundings. In ‘Eastern Voices’ the protagonist is the reporter and TV-producer, Larry Schiller, while the secondary characters consist of lawyers and journalists. To indicate different speakers and different points of view following each other, in the narrative, Mailer uses separate
paragraphs. Mailer shifts to the salient aspects of the different characters’ language while retaining an overall consistency in the spare, loose rhythms of the prose, avoiding any direct, clearly identifiable authorial comment. Occasionally, as in the passage below, it is not clear whether he is the source of the thought, or only of its selection and phrasing:

Brenda took a good look into his eyes and felt full of sadness again. His eyes had the expression of rabbits she had flushed, scared-rabbit was the common expression, but she had looked into those eyes of scared rabbits and they were calm and tender and kind of curious. They did not know what would happen next.

(16)

Here the perceptions are all clearly identified as Brenda’s until the final sentence. In the beginning of this passage it is not clear whether Mailer is reporting Brenda’s articulation of the expression in Gilmore’s eyes, or whether he is articulating what he believes she is indicating by her reported observations. In such passages the authorial point of view seems to emerge slightly, without ever quite separating from that of the character.

On the other hand, many of Mailer’s critics such as Diane Johnson, Judith A. Scheffler, and Joan Didion have noted the absence of authorial voice in The Executioner Song. Richard Stern remarks in his Missingeria and Literary Health: “Mailer’s absence is so pronounced that it dominates the book like an empty chair at a family dinner” (qtd. in Merrill 130). Christopher Ricks reflects that “[t]he author of Advertisements for Myself is here advertising nothing, least of all himself” (209). As already mentioned, actually it is the presence of Mailer’s autobiographical self in the shape of existential philosophy which is most noticeable in this “true-life” novel. Mailer himself states that “[Gilmore] appealed to me because he embodied many of the themes I’ve been living with all my life long” (Merill 141).
According to Anderson, “the rhetoric of silence is the central strategy,” (1987: 49) in these books. Anderson has also suggested that in *In Cold Blood* the rhetorical effect of the silence is twofold. First, we as readers are made to “assemble” the text ourselves, generating meaning from the “instructions” implicit in the narrative, and second, silence requires reading and interpretation, “gapping,” always calling for reader’s participation. These effects have been far more powerfully used in *The Executioner’s Song* than in Capote’s book. These gaps in literary texts create suspense, shape the plot, and determine strategic ambiguities. Hellman writes:

In *In Cold Blood* Capote sees fact as symbols and the portrays them as such; in *The Armies of the Night* Mailer sees a fact, consider any number of possible symbolic values, and then portrays that seeing and consideration. Capote portrays life as significant; Mailer portrays his search for significance in it. Capote presents actual objects that embody meaning; Mailer presents his attempt to elicit meaning upon them. (1981: 42-3)

Further in journalistic fiction, characterization transcends the conventions of traditional reporting with portrayal of people with psychological depth (Mark H. Mass 13). Wolfe described this technique as “... giving the full objective description, plus something that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective and emotional life of the characters” (Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson 21). Norman Mailer described Capote’s Perry as one of the great characters in American literature. Capote is credited with presenting in-depth characterization of the two killers, their victims, criminal investigators, and selected townspeople. Hollowell also observed that Capote’s greatest accomplishment was his characterization of the murderer, Perry Smith.
Literary journalists, Kerrane and Yagoda, have also praised Capote’s portrayal of Perry (Smith) and Dick (Hickock). According to them, “For a journalist to re-create events he did not witness requires a prodigious amount of reporting, and Capote could not have written In Cold Blood had he not met the two men after their capture, obtained their sympathy and cooperation, and interviewed them for hour after hour” (161). A detailed examination of the portrayal of Perry Smith reveals three things about the nature of this nonfiction novel: the affinity of Smith’s character to the character of Capote’s fiction; the methods of heightening dialogue and scenes; and the legitimacy of Capote’s claims that In Cold Blood should be considered literature rather than journalism.

Capote’s intimate portrait of the two killers truly breaks ground in the area of crime writing. According to a passage from Deborah Davis’ “Party of the Century”:

Truman’s interviews with Smith and Hickock transformed his journalistic piece into what he called a “Big Work”. They supplied him with all the details he needed to make the story come to life. Hickock had an extraordinary memory that was almost photographic in its accuracy…. Smith offered metaphor. He was a dreamer who had a boyish obsession with buried treasure …. Truman, who had a talent for getting close to his subjects in the most routine of circumstances, became intimate with these men who had been cut off from every other kind of social contact. (qtd. in Shields 171-173)

Discussing the characters of In Cold Blood, Capote felt that some kind of secular predestination was at work:

There is something so awfully inevitable about what is going to happen: the people in the book are completely beyond their own control. For example, Perry
wasn’t an evil person. If he’d had any chance in life, things would have been different. But every illusion he’d ever had, well, they all evaporated, so that on that night he was so full of self-hatred and self-pity that I think he would have killed somebody. (Clarke 211)

Nevertheless, to enlarge the scope of the narrative, Capote details the personalities of many secondary characters also, such as Al Dewey, the lead detective from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, Susan Kidwell, Bobby Rupp, Mr. and Mrs. Hickock, Tex and Flo Smith, Willie Jay, and Floyd Wells.

In *The Executioner’s Song*, Gary Gilmore is the central protagonist. The entire text of *The Executioner’s Song* is written to lay open the life of Gary. Nicole is Gary’s girlfriend. A majority of the secondary characters are static and Mormons who believe it to be their God-given duty to act as Gary’s intermediaries, thereby bettering their own chances of inheriting life as gods. Earl Dorius, Cline Campbell, Pete Galovan, and Mike Deamer, the prison officer in charge of the execution, are all fettered by their faith: “He [Mike Deamer] liked to think he had been sent to earth as a person with a mission to do some good for the betterment of society. It was his hope he had been foreordained to be part of a larger plan” (971). Their function in the novel is twofold: first, to serve as Gary’s foils; second, to personify the atrophy that Mailer finds, accommodates, and represses human creativity.

It has been observed that Gary Gilmore is the most unknowable character because Mailer never lets the reader know his point of view. Gilmore “just sat on a piece of machinery off to the side and ate the food in all the presence of his own thoughts. Nobody knew what he was thinking” (55). Every character, with the exception of Gilmore, has free indirect discourse. Even at the time of the first killing in *The Executioner’s Song*, Mailer does not indulge in any kind of
speculation about thoughts of the killer about this murder, although from time to time he enters into the mind of every other character. In this way, Gilmore is presented as the most mysterious character. The narrative style of The Executioner’s Song is ungrammatical and improvisational because of the material from the tapes of semiliterate people. According to Frank McConnel, the rhetoric in The Executioner’s Song has been found to be very much moving (Contemporary Literary Criticism 1980: 353).

On comparing and relating In Cold Blood with The Executioner’s Song, Mailer says “Of course I had read In Cold Blood and had obviously taken it into account” (qtd. in Plimpton, Truman Capote 214), and “Anyone assumed that I did The Executioner’s Song with In Cold Blood in mind” (Grobel 116). On the other hand, Capote had this to say about Mailer’s work:

ES … as far as I am concerned, is a nonbook. He didn’t live through it day by day, he didn’t know Utah, he didn’t know Gary Gilmore, he never even met Gary Gilmore, he didn’t do an ounce of research on the book—two other people did all of the research. He was a rewrite man like you have over at the Daily News.

(Capote, Grobel 113)

Defending the extent of being factually accurate in In Cold Blood, Capote himself succinctly puts in: “One doesn’t spend six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions” (Clarke 358). Yet he molds the truth at times. For instance, it was found that the physical appearance of the killers was altered. As George Garrett points out:

There is the complex matter of fact and judgment. When pictures of the people involved appeared in the magazines, it was clear how much of Capote’s descriptions and judgments are subjective, literary … later it turned out that they
did not do or say all the things attributed to them; and some things, neither he nor anyone else could have known. (473)

But at the same time an anonymous review of the book for the *Times Literary Supplement* noted that “witnesses are more and less reliable, and …. Mr. Capote gives the same weight to material taken from official records and that derived from things he was told long after the event by people who may or may not have been telling the exact truth” (“Stranger Than Fiction” 215).

Some of the characters are vivid, such as Nancy Clutter who is cheerful, scrubbed, and healthy daughter. The Clutters represented typical poignant victims. Their lives denied the possibility of evil, and thus were crucially diminished. The vignettes of minor characters were sharp and memorable. Gilmore’s character in Mailer’s book is mainly constructed through the viewpoints of the witnesses, as the author’s own attitude to Gilmore remains quite ambiguous.

Characterization is perhaps the greatest achievement of *Libra*. Where other novelists struggle to form a plot and create real characters to move it towards its conclusion, DeLillo pares away the multitude of plots and conspiracies and a myth that surround the events of November 1963, and forms a central narrative around which Oswald’s path to destiny can develop. DeLillo interweaves fact and fiction as he draws us inexorably toward Dallas, November 22. The real people (Jack Ruby, Oswald, his mother and Russian wife) are retrieved from history and made human, their stories involving and absorbing; the imagined characters are placed into history as DeLillo imagines it to have come to pass. *Libra* gives a crystal-clear, composite version of events.

The central protagonist, Lee Harvey Oswald, a marine who defected to the Soviet Union, lived in Minsk, married a Russian woman, is back in the United States, distributed “Hands off
Cuba” leaflets, and made no secret of being a leftist. DeLillo chose him as the thematic center of the novel, rather than President John F. Kennedy. An excerpt from one of Oswald’s letters to his brother, which DeLillo chose as an opening to the novel, suggests that Oswald’s need to become integrated in the larger flow of History is a key theme of the story: “Happiness is not based on oneself, it does not consist of a small home, of taking and getting. Happiness is taking part in the struggle, where there is no borderline between one’s own personal world and the world in general” (Libra 1). Jonathan Yardly observes that Oswald even on being the instigator of “the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century,” in Libra, has been portrayed as little more than an anonymous American of “mixed history” who sees himself as “a zero in the system” and longs “to reach the point where he was no longer separated from the true struggles that went on around him” (qtd. in Contemporary Literary Criticism 1980: 88).

Oswald is a public keyword from the outset, and here DeLillo’s effort is to make afresh characters that are already notorious in the public mind, giving suspense to a narrative already detailed in various post-assassination reports, depositions, and journalistic accounts. Oswald is portrayed as an anti-hero who effuses an air of inevitable tragedy. More than just a victim of powerful secret forces, he personifies a larger American flaw. DeLillo follows the story through to the end, as a wave of discord ripples through the nation and the mourning of the dead President commences. He succinctly reworks the historical material, portraying the characters that investigate Oswald, such as Win Everett, Larry Parmenter, and T. J. Mackey: all renegade CIA men involved in an intricate plot to kill the President. The conspirators have created a “world inside the world” (Libra 13), which they think is more structured than “real” life. They believe that their plot is “a better-working version of the larger world …. Here the plan was tighter. These were men who believed history was in their care” (127). In other words, they
believed that they had constructed a plot through which they could control history, a plot that had the structure of a literary narrative with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Another character, Win Everett, a demoted CIA agent, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, is forced to leave the foreground and teach at the Texas Woman’s University. He is unable to reconcile with being relegated to a petty job and searches for a solution to make the administration go back to Cuba. He needs an “electrifying event” and he finds it or rather, stages it: an attempt on the President’s life, in Dallas, that would point to the Cuban Intelligence Directorate. He believes that Kennedy must be scared into overthrowing Castro: “We don’t hit the President. We miss him. We want a spectacular miss” (Libra 27-28). But unfortunately, T-Jay Mackey, one of Everett’s fellows, secretly alters the initial plan. He recruits Ramon Benitez and Frank Vasquez from the growing community of Cuban exiles in Miami, and Wayne Elko, a soldier of fortune, but fails to inform them that the shooting has to be a miss and not a hit. In Contemporary Literary Criticism (1980: 90), Towers writes that the portraits of Lee Oswald, his bewildered Russian wife, Marina, and his egregious mother, Marguerite, are in substantial agreement with those drawn by Priscilla Johnson McMillan, Jean Stafford, Robert Oswald (Lee’s brother), and by Edward Jay Epstein in their several books on the subject.

DeLillo relied heavily on the Warren Commission’s 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits, which he described as “an encyclopedia of daily life from those era-dental records, postcards, photographs of pieces of knotted string, report cards, the testimonies of hundreds of people, from nightclub comedians to workers in train yards to waitresses” (qtd. by Tyler, The New York Times). DeLillo in an interview with Herbert Mitgang observed that in other books blending fact and fictional techniques, like Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood and Norman Mailer’s The Armies of the Night, all the people are drawn from real life and no fictional
characters are introduced. In *Libra*, both real and totally fictional people are presented. There are about 125 characters in the book; some are only cameo appearances, others essential for the author’s idea of what occurred during the assassination, which remains at the heart of this narrative.

Elaborated physical description lends validity and credibility to a work of literary journalism by developing characters within a narrative that is based solely upon reality. Literary journalists use physical description to develop specific themes around the characters in their narratives. The thematic implications of a character’s appearance are evident in many works of literary journalism. Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* is the classic retelling of a brutal murder. The story is told with rich journalistic details and events are recreated in as exact detail as possible. Capote has also included conversations in the sequence of events resulting in one of the first works to be classified as journalistic fiction and an instant classic. He has used physical description in his narrative, to his and the story’s advantage. Two antagonists of the story, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, are described in rich, vivid detail. Capote pays special attention to their appearance in order to develop the characters as sinister and evil. He feels that Dick was the most sinister, while Perry was simply following him. He introduces a dichotomy between both characters when describing their appearance in great detail.

Capote uses several images and words in an attempt to describe Dick’s facial features to the reader, which “… seemed composed of mismatching parts” (43). Dick’s face is described as being manufactured or built from the parts and components of multiple faces. Capote also writes:

It was as though his head had been halved like an apple, then put back together a fraction off center. Something of the kind had happened; the imperfectly aligned features were the outcome of a car collision in 1950–an accident that left his
long-jawed and narrow face tilted, the left side rather lower than the right, with the results that the lips were slightly aslant, the nose askew, and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, 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. (*ICB* 43)

Capote here introduces what is possibly a biblical reference in his description of the murderer, Dick, whose head has the appearance of a dissected apple. He also writes that Dick possessed a “serpentine” eye. The combination of an apple reference and a serpent reference imply images of the Garden of Eden, and the emergence of sin into the world of man. During the prison interviews with killers, Capote had admonished Perry in self-extenuating mood: ‘I had one of the worst childhoods in the world, and I’m a pretty decent, law-abiding citizen’ (Clarke 327).

In reality, Smith’s appearance is just as maligned as Dick’s. Capote writes, “Sitting, [Perry] seemed more than a normal-sized man, a powerful man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick, crouching torso of a weight lifter …” (26). However, upon standing, Perry is “… no taller than a twelve-year-old child” (*Capote* 26). Perry’s body is maligned just like Dick’s face. Perry is less menacing and, by implication, less evil as compared to Dick. When describing Perry’s face, Capote writes:

> Each angle of [his face] induced a different impression. It was a changeling’s face, and mirror-guided experiments had taught him how to ring the changes, how to look now ominous, now impish, now soulful; a tilt of the head, a twist of the lips and the corrupt gypsy became the gentle romantic. (26)
Perry, as evidenced by the way his features are described, is not as malevolent as his partner. He is an evil man, but not to the abominable extent that Dick is portrayed. Again, Capote chooses to accentuate facial features which imply characteristics that he wants to highlight in his characters. Nancy’s eyes imply that she is trustworthy and make her “immediately likable” (*Capote* 30). It is interesting to note that Dick’s eyes were also telling of his personality. His “serpentine” eye implies his deceptive nature. Nancy’s eyes, on the other hand, imply the exact opposite.

Mailer’s creative tool of description is such that it allows history to come alive. In *The Executioner’s Song* he has described the criminal tendencies in the nature of Gary, who is tall, thin, and extremely provincial. He has spent most of his life in reform schools or various prisons. His mother says, Gary “was in prison so long, he didn’t know how to work for a living or pay a bill. All the while he should have been learning he was locked up” (*ES* 312). That is why Gary constantly fears not being able to “make those years up” (42). He is awkward when out of prison; he wears mismatched clothes; he drinks excessively, commits crimes, cannot make friends and is poor with women.

“At night, Bessie (his mother) would ask him, ‘Where are you going?’, ‘Out to find trouble,’ Gary would reply, ‘find some trouble’ (468). Gary is not only a troublemaker but also a trouble seeker. He admits this to his interviewer:

I came out looking for trouble …. I had a tough-guy complex, that sort of smart aleck juvenile-delinquent attitude …. Nobody could tell me anything. I had a ducktail haircut. I smoked, drank, shot heroin, smoked weed, took speed, got into fights, chased and caught pretty little broads …. I stole and robbed and gambled …. (797)
When he is asked, “What did you want to make of your life?” he says “I wanted to be a mobster” (797). There are many instances which throw light on the criminal mind of Gary. Gary seemed to have an uncontrollable urge to commit crime. Mailer lets us understand that it is the psychopath in Gilmore who commits the crime, a crime that has a justification of its own. “I killed Jenkins and Bushnell because I did not want to kill Nicole,” (691) says Gilmore in another attempt to rationalize his crime. Killing then is Gilmore’s ultimate way of securing Nicole’s love. He repeatedly refers to his childhood dreams about being executed: ‘When I was a child … I had a nightmare about being beheaded. But it was more than just a dream …. Recently it has begun to make a little sense. I owe a debt, from a long time ago’ (305, 137). Gilmore is convinced that he has committed a crime in a past life, and that this crime has repeated itself.

At some points the description of dialogues becomes droning because he repeats “said” and “asked” so many times. These tags emphasize the book’s connection to nonfiction because they read like a newspaper article. Early in the novel, Mailer establishes this pattern of dialogue tags. On page 47 of the book, the author uses “said” or “asked” in nine straight lines of dialogue: “said Vern,” “said Gary,” “said Vern,” the first part of the conversation reads. “Asked Brenda,” “said Gary,” “said Brenda,” and so on, Mailer relates. He appears to remove himself from the writing because the dialogue tags are so straightforward, even lacking descriptors. Mailer chooses what the characters say, and Gutkind’s argument attests that, “as in fiction writing, dialogue enhances action and characterization” (1997: 23).

DeLillo has also used the tool of description very effectively. In Libra the element of description is found to be quite impressive, as in the following passage:

“It’s not just Kennedy himself,” Banister was saying on the other side of the door.

“It’s what people see in him. It’s the glowing picture we keep getting. He actually
glows in most of his photographs. We’re supposed to believe he’s the hero of the age. Did you ever see a man in such a hurry to be great? He thinks he can make us a different kind of society. He’s trying to engineer a shift. We’re not smart enough for him. We’re not mature, energetic, Harvard, world traveller, rich, handsome, lucky, witty. Perfect white teeth. It fucking grates on me just to look at him. Do you know what charisma means to me? It means he holds secrets. The dangerous secrets used to be held outside the government. Plots, conspiracies, secrets of revolution, secret of the end of social order. Now it’s the government that has a lock on the secrets that matter. All the danger is in the White House, from nuclear weapons on down. What’s he plotting with Castro? What kind of back channel does he have working with the Soviets? He touches a phone and worlds shake. There’s not the slightest doubt in mind but that a movement exists in the executive branch of the government which is totally devoted to furthering the communist cause. Strip the man of his powerful secrets. Take his secrets and he’s nothing.” (68)

In the above passage, a detective agent, Guy Banister is talking to Mackey about John F. Kennedy. There is enough detail about criminal activities and conspiracy in Chapter ‘20 May,’ in which Oswald has been found suitable, and is being finalized for the job of assassination. The narrative mode used in Libra to emphasize this is in direct discourse form:

“That’s the one. He talked to the Dallas field office of the FBI about this Oswald. They finally got him an answer. He left Dallas April twenty-four or twenty-five.”

“There’s a Russian wife.”

“Left Dallas May ten with their baby.”
“Nobody knows where.”

“That’s right.”

“Which leaves us groping?”

“I thought you had a line of communication.”

“George de Mohrenschildt. But he’s in Haiti. Besides I don’t want him to know how interested we are in Oswald.”

“How interested are we?”

“He sounds right, politically and otherwise. Win wants a shooter with credentials. He’s an ex-marine. I managed to get access to his M-1 score books and other records.”

“Can he shoot?”

“It’s a little confusing. The more I study the records, the more I think we need an interpreter. He was generally rated poor. But it looks like he did his best work the day he fired for qualification. He got a two-twelve rating day, which makes him a sharp-shooter. Except they gave him a lower designation. So either the number is wrong or the designation is wrong.” (Libra 118)

The above talk is giving an impression of how and on what basis Oswald has been selected, and how the conspirators’ plan would go on. The colour of Oswald’s eyes seems to be the product of interpretation, rather than a stable fact:

Oswald’s eyes are gray, they are blue, they are brown. He is five feet nine, five feet ten, five feet eleven. He is right handed, he is left handed. He drives a car, he does not. He is a crack shot and a dud. Branch has support for all these propositions in eyewitness testimony and commission exhibits. (Libra 300)
Everything is potentially true since everything is supported through eyewitness accounts or evidence. Yet everything cannot be true. The lack of certainty regarding even basic physical qualities underscores the fact that it is not possible for the historian to uncover the truth. He must decide which of the potential truths seem most plausible to him.

There are many prominent themes in *In Cold Blood*: the effect of environment and family on childhood; how a person of any locale can be a victim of hostility; and the presence of contrasting personalities. Capote gives the reader a detailed account of Perry Smith’s and Dick Hickock’s childhood. Smith’s childhood was very problematic and scarred by years of abuse. He witnessed beatings of his mother by his father; as a result of the domestic violence, his parents divorced. Due to these problems he ran away from home, and was “in and out of detention homes many times” (277). These violent episodes compelled his bitterness towards other human beings. When Smith entered adulthood, he committed acts of thievery and acts of battery. While in the merchant marines, he once threw a Japanese policeman off a bridge, and into the water. All these events had an impact on Smith, and his adulthood provided him with the opportunity to avenge the experiences that enraged him.

As opposed to this, Hickock’s childhood was marked by no signs of abuse or neglect, except that his parents were a little overprotective. He showed no real contempt for his parents, or his childhood. Dick’s inception into adulthood reveals his abnormal “tendencies” (Reed 115), and in the novel it is proved when Hickock says: “I think the main reason I went there [the Clutter home] was not to rob them but to rape the girl” (278). The two killers’ childhoods were obviously dissimilar, and their differences bring to question the formation of a killer’s mind. Smith’s lack of companionship during his childhood led him to search for companionship in Hickock. Hickock took advantage of Smith’s need by promoting his fantasies. Hickock truly felt
that Smith’s fantasies were ludicrous, but he supported his fantasies because he needed Smith’s aid to commit the murders.

Another important thing to note in *In Cold Blood* is that Capote was not much interested in the lives of good people like Clutters’ daughter and leader of the 4-H Club (which stands for ‘Head, Heart, Hands, Health’) (*ICB* 33), and took them as Soap-Opera characters. Capote’s depiction of their lives was not as in the case of criminals, being penetrated by his intelligence. He finds Perry Smith more enigmatic than any other character. Josephine Hendin feels that ‘Capote’s despair over the ruined Perry Smith is the index of his distance from the Clutters …. Is it better to deep-freeze fury than to feel it or even see it?’ (*Contemporary Literary Criticism* 1986: 5) In *In Cold Blood* lies Capote’s vision of the American soul living, dying and murdering in cold blood. Phillips also believes that *In Cold Blood* must also be understood as a portrayal of society because its most characters are “so thoroughly stereotyped that their motives and their behavior scarcely belong to them. They belong to all of us” (qtd. in Helten 54).

The most important theme in *In Cold Blood* is the randomness of crime. The Clutter family lived in rural Kansas, hundreds of miles from a major city, and the people of this small community felt a sense of security. The Clutter family murders made national headlines because this crime fits no stereotype. The Clutters were successful financially; they lived as well as any other family in town. However, there was no jealousy of the family’s success. This is another reason why this murder dismayed the inhabitants of Holcomb, the investigators, and the rest of the nation. The story of the murder of an exemplary American family, an act of apparently ‘motiveless malignity,’ carries a universal appeal for readers, no matter how they view its ultimate meaning; as a symbol of violence in America; as the failure of the American Dream; or as a social study of death-obsessed criminals (Garson, *Truman Capote* 143-43).
Another enduring subject among writers of journalistic fiction was ‘murder.’ Capote had once stated that the first step to write a nonfiction novel is to choose a subject that would not “date.” Thus by writing on the theme of murder, a topic that will endure, Capote fulfills the first requirement for a journalistic novel, a novel based on facts. Moreover, ‘Dick and Perry’s stories create an impression of murder as an omnipresent threat in the society presented’ (qtd. in Helten 54). Tom Wolfe’s definition of this form must be kept in mind when studying this work. He explains that it is the use by people of writing nonfiction techniques which heretofore had been thought of as confined to the novel or to the short story, to create in one form both the kind of objective reality of journalism and the subjective reality that people have always gone to the novel for. (qtd. in Weber 67)

Moreover, the treatment of capital punishment in the courtroom allows Mailer to insert some subtle commentary on the issue. His discussion of the death penalty in The Executioner’s Song implies that American public policies are flawed and hypocritical. In the absence of a fixed perspective, readers journey between various positions on murder, capital punishment, and media coverage in The Executioner’s Song. Readers are also witnesses to the execution, autopsy, and burial of Gary Gilmore. The entire body of the work serves to strengthen the reader’s participation in the capital punishment process.

Mailer’s interest in the death penalty and criminal responsibility is but one component of his fascination with the broader subject of violence in America. Mailer’s narrative is an evidence of the way in which acts of violence can achieve mythic status in American history. Gilmore’s role, as of Dick and Perry, is symbolic. He is, in one sense, a symbol of decaying American values, an example of what happens to a man raised without the support of a loving family, and
thrust into a world that has been overrun by chemical stimuli and a disdain for authority. Mailer presents a surface world of North American life in *The Executioner’s Song*. Before *The Executioner’s Song* went into print, its author admitted his purpose in adopting a markedly lean style, reminiscent of reported speech: “The aesthetic imperative, if there was one, finally came down to: let the book be lifelike,” Mailer told John Aldridge, “let it be more like American life than anything that’s been done in a long, long time” (182).

Another issue that catches Mailer’s attention is the nature of the modern-day trial as a site for media frenzy. The entire second half of the book (entitled “Eastern Voices”) focuses on the arrival of journalists from the East Coast to Utah to cover the Gary Gilmore trial. Mailer himself did not take part in this mad rush to the West, though his collaborator, Lawrence Schiller, was said to be the “ringmaster” of the media carnival that occurred outside the Provo City courthouse. Although Mailer did not actually participate in the run, yet he was able to gain access to information about the coverage. His commentary on the media here is particularly useful; he simultaneously plays the role of insider and outsider—inside enough to have valuable insight into the events, but outside enough to offer a more objective perspective (as he does in *The Armies of the Night*). With such a perspective, Mailer is able to expose the ways in which the overbearing media presence has a powerful impact on the carrying out of justice in America.

There is a perceptible change in the writing style and concepts used by Capote and Mailer in their later works. Actually through *In Cold Blood*, Capote wanted to point out that the Clutters were like us, the sort to whom the inconceivable does not happen. It is proved when Mr. Clutter spoke gently to the murderers, when he was awakened, and led them to the rest of the family members, and thereafter, allowed them to tie them up and tape his mouth. They didn’t even scream and defend themselves because they assumed that the murderers were only after their
money. But when Perry cuts Mr. Clutter’s throat, he screamed with utterly shocked surprise. They experienced a true nightmare. The Clutters could not believe the sheer madness they faced.

*In Cold Blood* produces a stark image of the deep doubleness prevailing in American life, by juxtaposing the lives and values of the Clutters and the killers. It depicted the gangsters versus the family men, the terrible meeting of the cursed and the blessed of America. For Capote, it is the American dream turning into an American nightmare. The shot gun blasts echo the collision of “desperate, savage, violent America” with “sane, safe, insular, even smug America.” Further, “old neighbors” are viewed as “strangers” and fear paralyses people’s self-confidence, and upsets their life pattern. Holcomb has become a crisis city (qtd. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 1990: 128). Once Norman Mailer wrote in one of *The Presidential Papers*, ‘Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the others underground’ (n. p.).

It can also be concluded that behind this heinous crime committed by Dick and Smith, we can hold Smith’s bad childhood responsible. He was a product of want and mistreated childhood. But Dick, on the other hand, had industrious, honest, loyal, loving, and supporting parents. So there is a controversy about the genesis of the psychopathic criminal. It can also be said that the crime they were destined to commit was pre-destined, and so out of their control. The narrative energy of the book is generated by that formative force which Capote thinks is “so awfully inevitable about what is going to happen: the people in the book are completely beyond their own control” (*Truman Capote: Conversations* 1987: 67). The killers never went to murder anyone in the Clutter House but just to rob them of some dollars.

DeLillo synthesizes elements of various conspiracy theories and crime, including the involvement of Mafia, anti-Castro forces, and a renegade CIA faction, all of which have a
motivation and the means for killing the President. Through the author’s artful portrayal of various stages of Oswald’s life, we come to believe in this strange character that desperately searches for the meaning of his life. DeLillo is a great novelist of conspiracies that span the American experience. At times, DeLillo also talks about the philosophies of life. In “American blood,” an article published by Rolling Stone magazine, DeLillo suggests that the John F. Kennedy assassination was a story about our uncertain grip on the world. A story exploded into life by a homeless man who himself couldn’t grip things tightly and hold them fast, whose soul-scared loneliness and rage led him to invent an American moment that echoes down the decades (1983: 23).

DeLillo amalgamates the conspiracy theories developed in the aftermath of the Warren Commission Report, basing his own theory on the findings of the 1970’s Congressional House Assassinations Committee, which expressed the suspicion that elements of Mafia and anti-Castro activists may have taken part in the plot. At the same time the BBC journalist Anthony Summer’s book Conspiracy, argued the possibility that “a renegade element in U.S. Intelligence manipulated Oswald” (qtd. in Contemporary Literary Criticism 1989: 93). Libra is more a study of the mystery of the life of Oswald than about why Kennedy was assassinated. Geographically and structurally, the novel takes Oswald all over space and time i.e. Texas, the Bronx, Dallas, Miami, Japan, and Russia.

Crime in Libra can be seen in the form of conspiracies being hatched to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. Libra, among other things, is a literary exercise on the subject of conspiracy, and the conspirators themselves are characters in a larger plot whose involutions they are unaware of. The element of conspiracy has been found at the start of the novel in the chapter entitled ‘26 April.’ This plan is not actually to kill the president but just to give a ‘spectacular
miss.’ Oswald, Parmenter and Everett, scheme away behind the scenes of history, planning an event so astonishing that it will in no way escape the clutches of history. They are the agents who actively bring about the monumental and historic event:

They wanted a name, a face, a bodily fame they might use to extent their fiction into the world. Everett had decided he wanted one figure to be slightly more visible than the others, a man the investigation might center on …. Mackey would find this man for Everett. They needed fingerprints, a handwriting sample, a photograph. Mackey would find the other shooters as well. We don’t hit the President. We miss him. We want a spectacular miss. (50-51)

This paragraph shows a conspiracy being hatched and also shows how this plan would work. This is going on in the mind of Win Everett (Libra 55). Everett is surprised to find that the Oswald character he has created already exists in the real world, that the fiction he has been devising is “a fiction living prematurely in the world” (179). This character already has his own aliases and forged documents, and he ends up playing the role Everett has designed for him so well because he is the role already. In his article, “Libra and the Subject of History,” Mott points out, “there is no difference between a scripted Oswald and the ‘real thing’” (139). The “real thing” is also a construct. In fact, I would argue that in DeLillo’s world there is no “real” Oswald as opposed to a “fake” one (1994: 145). Oswald is portrayed as a postmodern, unstable construct put together by texts.

Furthermore, it seems that Branch will never be able to “master the data” because of an excess of information, which includes photographs, eyewitness accounts, baptismal records, report cards, postcards, and tax returns. Branch also discovers that the texts contain innumerable
contradictions, so-called “facts” that are forever changing depending on who is interpreting them. However, DeLillo is careful to point out that Libra is only his fictional account:

Libra is a work of the imagination. While drawing from the historical record, I’ve made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination. I’ve altered and embellished reality, extended real people into imagined space and time, invented incidents, dialogues, and characters. (Author’s Note in Libra)

This note draws attention to the constructed nature of Libra, emphasizing that it is neither a purely historical account nor is it fiction that merely reflects reality. Rather it is an amalgamation of both. It has also been observed that DeLillo does not lose sight of many simple truths. Like Branch examines a goat’s head that has been shattered in a ballistic test, suggesting: “Look, touch, this is the true nature of the events …. Not your roomful of theories, your museum of contradictory facts. There are no contradictions here. Your history is simple. See the man on the slab. The open eyes staring. The goat head oozing rudimentary matter” (300). DeLillo here while describing the physical facts of Kennedy after death, wants to convey the horror of that violent death.

DeLillo also insists that he is “a novelist, not a private investigator,” and says “I think diction rescues history from its confusions. It can do this in a somewhat superficial way of filling in blank spaces. But it also can operate in a deeper way; providing the balance and rhythm we don’t experience in our lives, in our real lives. So the novel which is within history can also operate outside it- correcting, clearing up and, perhaps most important of all, finding rhythms and symmetries that we simply don’t encounter elsewhere” (“Oswald” 56; IDD, 56). DeLillo’s fiction presents us with another conspiracy theory, and insists that his novel’s mediated version
of events is the truth. The Kennedy assassination had an effect on Americans from which probably they will never recover:

The fact that it could happen. The fact that it was on film. The fact that two days later the assassin himself was killed on live television. All of these were psychological shock waves that are still rolling. The subsequent assassinations and attempted assassinations all seem part of the events of November 22\textsuperscript{nd}. (Warren Commission Report 338)

Moreover, Branch also thinks of Oswald’s act as “an aberration in the heartland of the real” \textit{(Libra 15)}.

Further the role played by the media to cover these disturbing events makes us feel even more lost in violence and crime. During an interview with Anthony DeCurtis, DeLillo agrees that television was an essential part of the significance of the Kennedy assassination:

It’s strange that the power of television was utilized to its fullest, perhaps for the first time, as it pertained to a violent event. Not only violent, but, of course, an extraordinarily significant event. This has become part of our consciousness. We’ve developed almost a sense of performance as it applies to televised events. And I think some of the people who are essential to such events … are simply carrying their performing selves out of the wings and into the theater. Such young men have a sense of the way in which their acts will be perceived by the rest of us, even as they commit the acts. So there is a deeply self-referential element in our lives that wasn’t there before. (1991: 48-9)

DeLillo reacts to the media’s ability to transmit events almost immediately, and also to the experience the nation shared following the President’s death. This video is famous not because
the event itself is significant but “because it is on tape” (159). The Texas Highway Killer himself claims that talking to a television anchor while the famous video played “made him feel real” (269).

So these works are strikingly similar: their subjects being, violent, senseless crime; prison life; trials; and punishment by execution. The characters, especially, Perry Smith and Gary Gilmore were talented artists. Rigorous research on the part of these authors turned literary journalists, is seen in their use of documents, interviews, and transcripts to present the past history not only of the criminals, but of the settings (small towns in the West, Holcomb, Kansas, and Provo, Utah). In addition, these texts use conventions of several nonfictional forms: biography, autobiography, history, and journalism. The novels are vastly different in execution, effect, as well as narration. The way of looking at the books seems to suggest that In Cold Blood and The Executioner’s Song are attempting to interpret these killings as the inevitable clash between good and evil elements within American society. Moreover, it seems to be a clash between ‘good’ America versus ‘bad’ America.

The promise of closure has great rhetorical power in these narratives. It brings satisfaction to desire, relief to suspense, and clarity to confusion. It normalizes. It confirms the masterplot. In In Cold Blood, the last chapter ‘The Answer,’ as the name indicates, in which Perry confesses is very long and detailed. In some ways, it brings closure in the novel. It is told in present tense, while the rest of the book is recounted in past tense. This temporal shift highlights the significance of this chapter. The confession is a closure insofar as it represents the end of mystery and a chase that occupies the police for most of the novel. But actual closure comes when after a total of five years- the case has been to the Supreme Court twice, and finally Perry and Dick are hanged on April 15, 1965.
Capote ends *In Cold Blood* with a scene at the cemetery in which Susan Kidwell and Alvin Dewey meet and converse while viewing the Clutter graves. This scene did not happen and is one of the “events” in the book that are often cited when the veracity of the writing is called into question. It does, however, provide a feeling of peacefulness at the end of an emotionally wrenching book and does show the healing power of the natural Kansas landscape and climate with its strong blowing winds, big blue sky, and endless rolling prairies. The end of *In Cold Blood* shifts the narrative focus from the “rainy” darkness of the execution scene to the “sunny” peacefulness of the cemetery, and is strong in its symbols representing images of life/death, sunshine/rain, cemetery/prison, future/past, hope/despair.

As expected, closure is achieved with the execution of Gary Gilmore by the shooting squad in *The Executioner’s Song*, which takes place in a room where the stage properties suggest the exit of the hero. “The room was lit, not brightly like a movie set, but lights were on him, and the rest of the room was dark. He was upon a little platform. It was like a stage” (979). It is meaningful in the sense that it shows that Gary’s pilgrimage is over. The speeches at his funeral are addressed to his memory, glorifying his virtues - dignity, charity, and love.

As a novel, *Libra* does not serve the purpose of providing any final answers. While it deals with historical events, it does not aim to “uncover” historical “truth.” Literature has a certain advantage over history in the sense that it does not need to prove anything or explain everything. Its purpose lies elsewhere. Willman asks a very relevant question in regard to *Libra*: “In what way can a work of art operating outside the world of empirical facts and established ‘reality’ help us to understand the JFK assassination?” (623) The purpose of literature is to create meaning that exists outside of the empirical. It can offer a kind of “truth” in that it can provide us with perspectives on the human experience. As Oswald’s mother says in explanation of her son’s
actions, “Your honor, I cannot state the truth of this case with simple yes and no. I have to tell a story” (Libra 449). Jonathan interprets the ending of Libra and the facts. For him Libra is merely another ripple in that tide, precisely because it so clearly is not “apart and complete” within the literature of the assassination. Libra in the guise of fiction offers only “half-facts” presented through the eyes and actions of a cast of characters not a single member of which comes to life (Contemporary Literary Criticism 1989: 68).

All these authors, Capote, Mailer and DeLillo, have shown their sympathy more towards the criminals, Perry Smith, Gary Gilmore and Oswald, instead of the victims. They have presented these criminals as mysterious characters with troubled childhoods, with reasons for their criminal tendencies, once again skewing the rhetoric in their favour. These villains were already notorious in the public mind, and are effused with the sense of tragedy.

The Executioner’s Song not only signaled Mailer’s last journalistic fiction, but the last of this tradition. No doubt there are novels that combine reality and fiction together; nevertheless, none has set about to deliberately blend journalistic techniques with literary techniques. For instance, Don DeLillo’s Libra seemed at first to be in a similar vein, however, Lee Harvey Oswald’s tale in it, did not reflect anything truly factual as he states in the author’s note, at the end of the novel, he “made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination” (DeLillo 462). Libra and other fiction under study, like Underworld and Falling Man by DeLillo can be considered more like pieces of historical fiction, rather than journalistic fiction.