

The Reception of Truman Capote in Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

*Truman Capote (1924–1984) is one of the most prominent authors of the post-war generation of writers in the United States of America. Despite the fact that his major works *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood* were translated into Slovenian quite early by Maila Golob, Capote did not influence literary trends in Slovenia. Until today, the following three of Capote's novels and a prose collection have been translated into Slovenian: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (*Zajtrk pri Tiffanyju*), *In Cold Blood* (*Hladnokrvno*), and *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (*Drugi glasovi, druge sobe*) and the collection *Music for Chameleons* (*Glasba za kameleone*). Keywords: Truman Capote, reception, Slovenia, American, literature, translation.*

Introduction

Truman Capote, one of the most prominent post-war American writers, was born on 30 September 1924 as Truman Streckfus Persons in New Orleans in Louisiana, and was raised in various parts of the South (Alabama, New Georgia). His childhood was very unhappy. His parents could not provide a safe family environment for him and they soon divorced. Consequently, Capote spent the majority of his childhood with his relatives. This strongly marked his whole writing career. Capote left school when he was fifteen and subsequently worked for the New Yorker. According to his beliefs, college was a waste of time for someone who wanted to become a writer. Capote's first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was published in 1948. The book was not a huge success, but it assured Capote a place among the most prominent American authors of the generation after the Second World War. The story focuses on a teenager's awareness of his own homosexuality. The novel is semi-biographical, and it helped Capote to discover his identity as a man, a homosexual, and an artist. The first Capote's novel was translated into Slovenian in 2010 by Suzana Tratnik under the title *Drugi glasovi, druge sobe*. The translation was published by one of the leading Slovenian publishing houses Cankarjeva založba.

However, it should be stated that in Slovenia the first Capote's novel was noticed long before 2010. As early as 1951 Slovenian literary critic Janez Gradišnik mentioned Truman Capote and his first novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in the magazine called *Novi svet*. According to Gradišnik, with his novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* Capote

proved that he was one of the most talented authors of his time. As early as 1950s Truman Capote was well known among people belonging to literary circles in Slovenia. According to him, the majority of the articles on Capote and his works were signed by Janez Gradišnik. In his article titled "Sodobno svetovno pripovedništvo in naša prevajalska dejavnost" ("Contemporary world prose and our translation activity"), published in the Slovenian magazine *Nova obzorja* in 1958, Gradišnik listed the authors who were dealing with homosexuality in their works. Among Gore Vidal and Frederick Buechner he also mentioned Truman Capote. Gradišnik was critical towards them and he even stated that they were stuck "in a kind of constructed world of their" (Gradišnik 1958: 226).

Furthermore, in this article Gradišnik listed the reasons why the authors had not yet been translated into Slovenian. He argued that there was very little behind the metaphors and the style in their writings. In 1958 Gradišnik published another article on the generation of the young American writers in the magazine *Nova obzorja*. This time he stated that Vidal, Buechner and Capote were very talented young writers (Gradišnik 1958: 252 v [10, 41]). The following article worth mentioning is titled "Nekaj misli o sodobni ameriški književnosti" ("Some thoughts on contemporary American literature") by Vlado Habjan published in the newspaper *Primorski dnevnik* in 1951. Habjan asked himself who of the writers of the young American generation might have been the next Steinbeck, Faulkner or Dreiser. Among the possible candidates he mentioned Truman Capote. The same year Capote is again mentioned in the journal *Vestnik* — in the article titled "Povojni roman v Ameriki" ("Post-war novel in America"). An unknown author argued that Capote and some of the young authors were too selfcentred and not interested enough in the real world (Gradišnik 1958). Further on, Capote is presented in the article by Vasja Ocvirk in the magazine *Mladinska revija* of the year 1950/1951. There the writer's interesting private life was described and the plot of the novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was presented (Ocvirk 1950/1951: 500).

In 1955, the journal *Naši razgledi* published several articles on Capote. One of them had a title "Truman Capote, novi ameriški pripovednik" ("Truman Capote, the new American storyteller"). There it was stated that the French translation of Capote's *A Tree of Night and Other Stories* was very successful in Paris (Ocvirk 1950/1951: 500). Also Leonora Flis notes that in Slovenia there is little published on Capote's earlier texts (those from the forties and fifties of the twentieth century), but at the beginning of the sixties the interest in Capote's works in Slovenia increased. In 1960, the newspaper *Delo* wrote about Capote and his awarded story "Miriam" that was also aired on the Slovenian television in 1960. It should be noted that Slovenian readers received the novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's* very well. In 1965, the newspaper *Ljubljanski dnevnik* stated that in the bookstores in Ljubljana this was the second best-selling book. The popularity rose further after in 1965 the novel was translated into Slovenian by Maila Golob (Slovenian translation *Zajtrk pri Tiffanyju* was published by *Mladinska knjiga*, which was one of the leading publishing houses in Slovenia of that time). In 1960s Capote was mentioned several times in Slovenian national newspapers *Delo* and *Večer*.

In 1966 the latter reported that the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was a huge success. It should be noted that by many people in Slovenia Capote is most remembered by this film [10, 43] and that in Slovenia *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (*Zajtrk pri Tiffanyju*) is Capote's most popular work. The following of Capote's bestsellers was the novel *In Cold Blood*. Despite the fact that also the movie based on the novel was shot, the book could not surpass the success of Capote's previous novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. The film *Capote*, filmed in 2005, shows the six years of creation of this novel. It was published in 1966 by Random House and mentioned in Slovenian newspapers as early as 1966. In the newspaper *Večer* it was stated that among American non-fiction works *In Cold Blood* held the first place. Firstly, in newspaper articles, *In Cold Blood* was translated into Slovenian as *Ohlajena kri*, which was incorrect. A year later, in 1967 Maila Golob translated the whole novel into Slovenian and she translated the title as *Hladnokrvno*, which is a correct solution. The Slovenian translation of *In Cold Blood* was published by the Mladinska knjiga publishing house. Slovenian literary critic Adrijan Lah praised Capote's non-fiction novel and its translation in his 1969 article published in the newspaper called *Nedeljski dnevnik*, and he compared the Capote's novel with Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Shortly after the release of the Slovenian translation of *In Cold Blood*, the magazine *Knjiga*, intended primarily for librarians, presented Capote's non-fiction novel, the plot of the book, and the writer's efforts to write a novel that any other author failed to write. In 1967 also the newspaper *Večer* devoted a whole article to this Capote's masterpiece. While writing the novel *In Cold Blood* Capote started drinking and taking pills. He announced the title of his next novel — *Answered Prayers*. But when in 1975 the magazine *Esquire* published the first chapter, this triggered a wave of indignation in some circles of his wealthy friends who had recognized themselves in Capote's characters. They felt betrayed, and they started rejecting him. Due to the public rejection Capote became depressed. But despite alcohol, drugs and severe depression Capote was able to write. His next book, *Music for Chameleons* (1980) was praised by critics as a collection of excellent prose. The collection was translated into Slovenian as *Glasba za kameleone* by Vlado Senica in 1988 and published by Prešernova družba. It can be stated without exaggeration that Truman Capote had long been relatively little noticed in Slovenia. He was known by the professional public, but otherwise quite often rather overlooked.

According to Flis, Intihar Klančar and Potočnik his works in 1940s and 1950s had not attracted much attention by the critics in Slovenia. Many of his works were not even translated. The Slovenian magazines and newspapers published a few articles on Capote, but they were mainly about the author's style and were often wondering whether good style was enough for a successful writing career. Authors of the articles in the Slovenian newspapers liked to write about Capote's varied personal life and his open homosexuality [12, 82–85]. Similarly, Sandi Cvek in his article "Truman Capote: a beautiful child", published in the January issue of the *Pepita* magazine in 1993 was interested in Capote's personal life. Flis [8, 164–165] also notes that despite initial enthusiasm of the Slovenian

critics Capote's nonfiction or documentary novel *In Cold Blood* did not become a model for Slovenian authors and did not influence the Slovenian literary trends. In Slovenia, the interest of the general public in Truman Capote increased again in 2006, when in Slovenian cinemas the film *Capote* about the writer and the emergence of the novel *In Cold Blood* was screened. The film from 2005 was based on the book by Gerald Clark and directed by Bennett Miller. At the time, the majority of the Slovenian media wrote about Capote. In the magazine *Mladina* Marcel Štefančič wrote that Capote was "a liberal seducer, saloon dandy and showman", adding that the novel *In Cold Blood* destroyed Capote [14]. In 2006, Capote received additional attention in Slovenia because the novel *Truman Capote v Sinaloi* by César López Cuadras was translated into Slovenian by Marjeta Drobnič. The article on the translation of Cuadras's novel was published in Slovenian literary magazine called *Bukla*. In 2014, Truman Capote would have been ninety years old. The anniversary was marked also in Slovenia.

In April 2014 the national television of Slovenia aired a film on Capote titled *Infamous* that was filmed in the United States in 2006 and based on the book *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career* by George Plimpton. By publishing an article on the non-fiction novel *In Cold Blood* in December 2014 also the Slovenian journal *Dialogi* marked the anniversary of Capote's birth. It can be concluded that nowadays despite only four of Capote's translations into Slovenian, Truman Capote is well known in the literary environment in Slovenia. Also in Slovenia there are a few Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral dissertations that deal with the works of Truman Capote. Among the researches Flis and Merljak Zdovc, who have extensively dealt with literary journalism, should be mentioned.

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