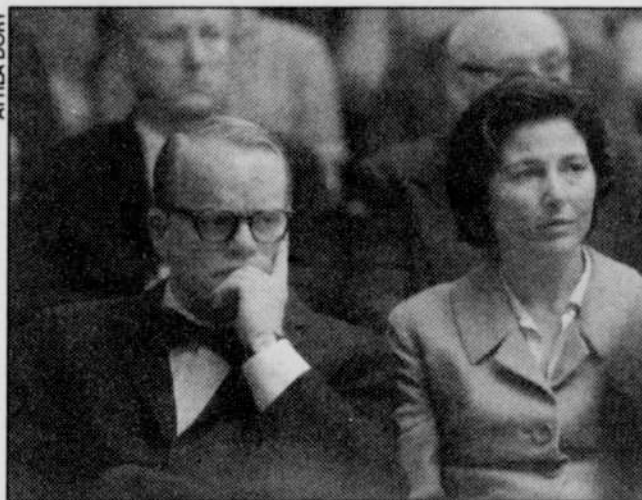


FILM

Capote

In 1959, queer novelist Truman Capote became fascinated by what appeared to be the senseless murder of an upright family of four in rural Kansas. When the white-trash killers are caught, he meets them and becomes obsessed with one, Perry Smith, following his progress through the courts, finding new lawyers, facilitating appeals—all in the interest of writing what would become the groundbreaking “first nonfiction novel,” 1966’s *In Cold Blood*.

Of course, Capote was about much more than that book. Unrepentant sissy with a babyish voice, world-class raconteur, vicious (and vengeful) wit and leading literary light catapulted to fame by *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, he was an inescapable figure from the late ’50s through the ’70s. Often involved in scandals—few who’ve seen it will forget his live TV attack on novelist Jacqueline Susann, whom he denounced as “a truck driver in drag!”—he was a major consumer of drug and drink and a very



Philip Seymour Hoffman (with Catherine Keener as Harper Lee) deserves an Oscar for *Capote*.

uncloseted queen who lived in an open relationship for years with Jack Dunphy.

Bennett Miller’s *Capote*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman in the title role, is inexplicably billed as a “biopic,” but the film focuses solely on his involvement with the *In Cold Blood* project, which lasted a good six years. As such, it’s a powerful and effective film. Capote’s complex relationship with Smith is beautifully nuanced, as the writer simultaneously exploits the killer for artistic purposes, lying and manipulating him throughout, and becomes infatuated if not in love with him.

The film succeeds in connecting Capote with Smith through bitter scenes of reminiscing about their strangely similar childhoods. It’s also a nicely fleshed-out portrait of the clash of two worlds—Capote’s brittle, sophisticated New York party scene (shown in brief, cutting tableaux) and the hardscrabble world of rural Kansas that’s understandably suspicious of the brazenly sophisticated interloper who’s arrived to pry out their secrets.

Hoffman’s performance is brilliant and Oscar-worthy, moving with absolute authority from drunken bitterness to cattiness to nobility. He apparently listened to many hours of Capote’s distinctive voice, and he quickly takes on the persona of his subject in every detail. His fluttering hand movements and eye-rolling languor decisively recall the man for those who’ve seen the original.

But queer viewers may have qualms with

Tru or false?

Queers may have qualms with *Capote*

BY GARY MORRIS

the film that haven’t occurred to the straight press, which has been heaping unfettered praise on it. *Capote* is annoyingly typical of the Hollywood Whitewash in de-homosexualizing its subject. Despite showcasing his fey mannerisms and voice, the film studiously avoids the slightest visualizing of affection or lust by this man who obviously was capable of plenty of both.

Especially annoying is a scene in which Capote appears to get cruised. A hunky man who at first seems to be a disgruntled local stares unabashedly at him. Does Capote, who returns the look, follow him? It’s implied but not shown in a scene that lasts maybe half a minute. Must we guess at this kind of thing in 2005? The only real clue we have is in the credits, where the character is identified as “Cruiser.” Not good enough.

Another troubling touch is the portrayal of Dunphy (Bruce Greenwood), shown as a kind of long-suffering wife type begging hubby to pay some attention. For all their physical connection, he might as well be the maid. These complaints aside, *Capote* is a strong study of a com-

plex relationship between two lost souls and a moment when a gay man made literary history.

Never Been Thawed

Laughs are scarce in this shrill, sophomoric mockumentary that will make you want to repossess every privately held video camera in the country.

Directed by Sean Anders, who also stars, *Never Been Thawed* follows a group of obsessive “frozen food collectors” in Arizona, two of whom are also in a band of Christian rockers (The Christers) out to hit the big time. Anders piles on the jokes like an interstate car wreck, desperately attempting to wring laughs from juvenile riffs on 12-step programs, the abortion debate, Starbucks (reincarnated as a right-wing coffee joint called No Choice), queer reparative therapy, Jesus rock, deafness, shock jocks, evil businessmen and mindless collectors. Embalmed stereotypes like “Scott Baxter,” a self-absorbed, ultra-queeny fireman who steals commemorative plates from burned-up buildings, will surely annoy

even straight audiences used to *Will & Grace*, much less more sophisticated queer viewers.

Thawed screens 2 p.m. Oct. 23 during the Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival at Hollywood Theatre, followed by a weeklong run starting Oct. 28. [F]

GARY MORRIS is a Portland free-lance writer who spends his spare time writing the *OK American Novel*.



Never Been Thawed belongs in the deep freeze.

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