

Review *CAPOTE*, written by Kevin Murphy

Running time: 114 mins

Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener, Chris Cooper, Clifton Collins Jr., Mark Pellegrino

In a year blessed with a wealth of good performances, Philip Seymour Hoffman is thoroughly deserving of the Golden Globe for his extraordinary portrayal of the author Truman Capote. More usually confined to supporting roles in which he invariably steals every scene he's in, Hoffman is finally given the opportunity to assert his position as one of the finest actors of his generation. The manner in which he channels the whiny-voiced and mannered author of such classics as *Breakfast At Tiffanys* is uncanny.

It's Hoffman's performance that elevates *Capote* to a level beyond its constituent parts. The film centres on the six-year period during which Capote wrote his career defining true crime novel *In Cold Blood* based on the brutal murder of a Kansas family. The experience, during which he struck up a close relationship with one of killers, left Capote devastated, hastening his alcoholic decline.

Based on Gerald Clarke's book, the project was the brainchild of director Bennett Miller and his old classmate, screenwriter Dan Futterman, both of whom were close friends of Hoffman. It was only after numerous approaches that the reluctant actor conceded to take on the role. Their persistence was well rewarded.

Capote was already a highly regarded American literary figure in 1959 when he saw a news report about the murders of four members of the Clutter family in a rural Kansas town. Convincing the *New Yorker* editor William Shawn (Bob Balaban) that the case might prove a good basis for a new book, Capote heads to Kansas with his dear friend and fellow author Harper Lee (Catherine Keener), whose success with *To Kill A Mockingbird* was imminent, not to mention a source of envy for Capote.

Once away from the social and intellectual whirl of New York, Capote finds himself effected by the down home integrity of the locals. "Ever since I was a child, folks have thought they had me pegged because of the way I am, the way I talk. And they're always wrong," he confesses to a young girl. But it's when he starts to get close to Perry Smith (Clifton Collins Jr.), one of the arrested killers, along with his Richard Hickock (Mark Pellegrino), that he recognizes his own good fortune. "It's as if Perry and I grew up in the same house. And one day he went out the back door and I went out the front, " Capote reflects, as he ponders how much he has in common with the sensitive and troubled murderer and the similarity of their corrupted upbringings.

Their connection, given greater resonance by the author's homosexuality, causes Capote great conflict as he struggles to finish his book knowing only the execution of Smith and Hickock would provide it with its perfect ending. "I couldn't have done anything to save them," he defends. "Maybe not Truman, but the truth is, you didn't want to," Lee retorts.

More a character study than a crime drama, both Miller and Futterman do a sterling job of evoking the period and the emotional climate, aided by strong supporting

performances from Collins Jr., Keener and Chris Cooper as the local detective assigned to the case. But it's very much the Truman show and its star, Hoffman, is the personification of Capote's flawed genius.