

Themes of identity loss in Truman Capote

Food & Diet



Loss of identity can be both a fascinating and very painful trait for a person to possess. Throughout his work, Truman Capote consistently employs characters who are far from self-actualization. This can be seen through his use of descriptive imagery which often illustrates the different ways that someone far from self-actualization can be perceived by both themselves and others. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is the story of a young writer, Paul Varjak's encounter and eventual love affair with his enchantingly eccentric neighbor Holly Golightly.

Those who don't know Holly all that well receive the impression that she is not much more than the beautiful, carefree facade she puts forth. With a closer look, Paul finds that she is not who she seems to be. Holly has always struggled to find her identity and plays whatever character suits her fancy. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is about Joel Knox, a twelve-year-old boy who, after the death of his mother, receives an invitation to live with his absentee father on Skully's Landing. Not only is the landing itself isolated, but so is Joel. Due to his dainty femininity, he has always been alienated by his peers. Joel's feelings of isolation, combined with a lack of knowledge about his living family, create a lot of identity problems for Joel during his formative years.

Holly Golightly, while not the narrator of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, remains the main focus of the novel. When describing her through the eyes of others using imagery to minutely describe her physical appearance, Truman Capote often draws upon her beauty and her seemingly magnetic aura that draws people in. "The ragbag color of her boy's hair, tawny streaks, strands of albino-blond and yellow caught the hall light" (13). This illustrates how she often catches the light and portrays her as a shining beacon of sorts.

The many colors in her hair can also be viewed as symbolism for Holly's many personalities, all characters that she puts on for people to see. Other times, Holly lets small pieces of her insecurities show through what she wants everyone to believe her handwriting for instance is described as "freakishly, awkward kindergarten hand" (28). It is in these minor flaws where one can realize that Holly is not the image of perfection that she often seems to be. Those who know Holly better realize that she is a fake, and somehow appreciate her all the more for it. Her agent O.

J. Berman states "She's such a goddamn liar maybe she doesn't know herself anymore" (32). Capote's use of Holly's elusive past helps to draw the reader in by sparking curiosity, the novel is set up so at the beginning readers will believe in Holly's false image and can experience an unravelling of what they originally believed by the end. For most of his life, Joel has been isolated from his peers due to his femininity. Throughout the novel Joel encounters issues finding a gender with which he more identifies. He is even more confused when he encounters his cousin Randolph, a transvestite which arises the question of whether or not he is required to behave in the manner that society would rather he behave. Idabel, a tomboy that befriends Joel senses that Joel may be harboring romantic feelings towards her which angers her quite a bit "you either behave like we're brothers, or you don't behave at all" (174). This arises the question of Joel's sexuality, although Idabel is in fact a girl, she is on the manly side.

This also arises the question of Idabel's sexuality if she is against the idea of a boy's romantic affection it is possible that she may be a lesbian. The rejection that Joel receives further increases the sense that Joel is an outcast.

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In *Breakfast at Tiffany's* there is the question of whether or not Holly realizes she is a fake. At times Holly seems fully aware of her identity issues but often she lies to herself as well as others by convincing herself that she is merely the character she plays in the grand spectacle of the life she leads. When she states: "I'm always top banana in the shock department" (61), she is plainly stating that she makes an attempt to shock people in order to keep their attention.

Although Holly clearly cares about the reactions of others, at times she seems to not consider any of the consequences of what she says to others. "I've had a little go at marijuana, it's not half as destructive as brandy, cheaper too" (92), she is unabashedly getting herself into trouble through her disregard for the reactions of others. Her awareness of these issues is also displayed in her embracing of spontaneity, "of course we'll be married, I've never been married before" (67).

This shows Holly is willing to try anything new in hopes of finding out who she is and what she truly wants from life. Joel, often questions his own identity, he has no mother and a mysterious father leaves him basically without any traditional father figure. Similar to Holly, Joel often re-invents himself without realizing that the impression he creates is a false one. Joel's inner dialogue states: "Somehow, spinning the tale, Joel had believed every word" (59). When Capote pens: "It was as if he lived those months wearing a pair of spectacles with green, cracked lenses, and had wax-plugging in his ears, for everything seemed to be something it wasn't, and the days melted in a constant dream" (10), it perfectly exemplifies Joel's awareness of his constant state of ignorance, the use of colored glasses is also used as a

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symbol for ignorance when Idabel states: " take my colored glasses, Idabel offered.

everything looks a lot a lot prettier" (127). Truman Capote successfully conveys the toils of life with no identity, through his work. In both *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Other Voices, Other Rooms* characters are exposed for being something other than what they seem to be.