

Symbolism of the Title *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

—Holly's imprisonment named freedom and Capote's aid for it—

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## Introduction

I am always drawn back to places where I have lived, the houses and their neighbourhoods. For instance, there is a brownstone in East Seventies where, during the early years of the war, I had my first New York apartment. (9)<sup>1</sup>

This work begins with a recollection with mention of a place at a time. The beginning of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) is a very suggestive beginning which implies a protagonist's quest for identity, Truman Capote's (1924-84) stormy life searching for the meaning of existence, and the effort to become a professional writer by narrator " I " (9), that is quest for the establishment of status and occupation which brings about the identity of narrator in youth. The reason why *Breakfast at Tiffany's* keeps its popularity is the characterization of the elusive heroine in the late adolescent age, overlapping the image of the author Capote and narrator " I " , and the mysterious plot of the work. Because of these traits, this work is popular even more than fifty years after its publication. Not only because of the influence of the Hollywood movie, there must be a lot of secrets supporting this work's charm. Actually there are a lot of effusive appeals in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* which is not more than one hundred

pages in paperback.

Often paying attention to the author's biographical facts causes reproach from professionals who say this is out of date in the present context of literary theory. But I strongly think that a biographical approach is effective literary theory as it is one of the basic approaches to evaluating literature. In fact, modern theories sometimes follow basic critical approaches, or often are included in the category of them. Here, I want to start my argument by offering a biographical approach to develop my ideas.

The idea of having a thirst and quest for the unsatisfied love is usually used to express the trait in Capote. When he was four, his parents divorced and his mother also died when Capote was twenty nine. His father was a frivolous man without care for the family and was always telling tall tales. His mother continued to flirt with unknown men at night, confining the son in a room. These are the explanation of Capote's parents and under these circumstances, Capote felt a sense of loneliness and, in his later years, he turned out to distrust people, especially women, falling into the erroneous trap of homosexuality, heavy drinking, and drug. These phenomena are not difficult to understand in light of the experience with such parents. As Helen Garson points out, Capote was searching for the people " the one who would never abandon him " (10). Psychologists explain that the experience of infancy leaves

a great influence on one's later life. It is the axiom which is very known to many people. Kenneth Reed says this delicate work *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is " veiled, loosely autobiographical tales that reflect to some limited extent the author's personal history " (123). Also I think this work includes Capote's biographical reality to great extent, from the point of heroin Holly Golightly's<sup>2</sup> groundless nature and quest for identity and the fact this work's narrator's job is also writer.

It is sometimes dangerous to identify the characters in the work with the author, but I want to develop my argument about *Breakfast at Tiffany's* from a biographical point of view, considering the common traits between Holly and Capote. Holly enjoys liberty, but in fact she cannot find her identity. She is nothing but a wandering woman without an identity. Capote was also a wandering man who was searching for ungained love during life. They are both wandering, searching people.

The title evokes a high-class accessory shop on fifth street in New York which all women yearn for. Does this name seem to be unnatural if you consider the plot of work? Heroine Holly maintains a crafty life with a lot of henchmen. The title *Breakfast at Tiffany's* sounds to be a artificial title if we think about brother Fred's death, the arrest of heroine, the miscarriage caused by heroine, going forth to South America, and wandering in Africa. Why did Capote give his work the name

*Breakfast at Tiffany's*? There must be some hidden intention of the author. The aim of this paper is clarify the meaning of this title.

## **II Holly's freedom and penalty**

What nature does Holly have? She is a representative of freedom, represented in her calling card "travelling" (16). The structure of the work also gives one the impression of unreality because a memoir of her after a lapse of ten more years is the main plot. Her actual age is nineteen, but the narrator "I" found that out afterwards. "It was a face beyond childhood, yet this side of belonging to a woman. I thought her anywhere between sixteen and thirty" (17). These appearance describes Holly's unreal nature ambiguously. These unreal impression gives her a image of fluidity.

She had the experience of losing a chance of becoming a Hollywood star. Holly threw away her chance by herself. She lost the stability of her own identity that an occupation and steadiness of life permit. Holly frankly criticizes the misery of the room in the conversation between her and the narrator "I". She utters these words below, responding to my answer "Oh[oh], you get used to anything" (22).

' I don't. I'll never get used to anything. Anybody that does, they might as well be dead. ' (22)

It means death for her to get used to anything, also the establishment of an identity means death for her. She threw away her death and identity at one time by rejecting the camera test. She never believes in the stability or establishment. She often sings a song like this. “ Don’t wanna sleep, Don’t wanna die, just wanna go a-travelling’ through of the sky ” (21). This song expresses her uncertainty. O. J. Berman says about Holly’s missing the camera test, by saying “ She[she] believes all this crap she believes. You can’t talk her out of it ” (32). Holly believes in uncertainty, in other words, uncertainty of identity. Freedom, unreality, and uncertainty: These are the words standing for Holly’s nature.

Holly is not an arbitrary and carefree character which is described in the text superficially. Her life seems to be unrestrained, but actually this is a licentious life of being punished by freedom which doesn’t bring stability. She continues to deceive the people around her because “ She’s[she’s] a goddamn liar ” ) (34), but also she deceives herself. Garson says that “ Self-deception[self-deception] is not one of Holly’s failing, although she is an extraordinary liar ” (82). Does this comment shoot the target?

Actually she seems to love uncertainty and seeks it, but she unconsciously from the bottom of heart, searches for steadiness. “ I ” is called “ Fred ” by her. This name comes

from the feeling that she cherishes her family. Her delirium resulting from the loss of her brother represents the loss of heart stability and the loneliness, with the sorrow of having lost her only blood relation. She moves between the search for uncertainty and the search for stability. It is the hope of having a connection with people and her loneliness that she makes her continue to deceive men and draw them around her. This is her unconscious thinking. She says about her pet that the cat is a

... ' poor slob without a name. It's little inconvenient, his not having a name. But I haven't any right to give him one: he'll have to wait until he belongs

to somebody. We just sort of took up by the river one day, we don't belong to each other: he's an independent,

and so am I. I don't want to own anything until I know I've found the place where me and things belong together.

(46)

An astray cat, which has no home, and she who was picked up as an orphan, are overlapped each other. We can read her true feeling: That she doesn't want anything and wants to be uncertain until she can find the ground of heart, but from a

different viewpoint, this attitude seems to be her hope that she wants to get the heart basis as soon as possible. When she goes to South America, she throws away her cat. This action represents her rejection of her own image of being a rootless character by dumping the cat, that is her alter ego. This action is caused by her feeling that she wants to live a new life in a new land, searching for a steadiness of heart.

So in the context of this argument, the opinion of Garson mentioned above that she doesn't deceive herself seems to be irrelevant. She unconsciously tries to achieve steadiness of heart but against this unconscious feeling, she continues to seek uncertainty and tell a lie to herself. She tells herself a lie about freedom unconsciously. She is a heroine who deceives herself without seeing the real heart of her own. Her sunglasses which are her trademark are prescription lenses. The sunglasses imply that she doesn't or cannot see the reality of her mind. When she doesn't wear the sunglasses, she has " as assessing squint " (22) which represents her doubt about her life and struggle for it. This item conceals her struggling nature, and she continues to live an uncertain life and keeps on deceiving herself though at the bottom of heart, she wants stability of mind. Holly's sunglasses are symbolic item which implies the self-deceit of her. As mentioned above, although she seems to be free and easy, but actually she is suffering from freedom unconsciously because her heart is in uneasy



condition. She is prepossessed with the punishment of freedom whose nature is far from a real free and easy condition.

### **III Capote's aid for Holly**

Doesn't Capote give a help to Holly who enjoys a fake freedom and licentious life? No, Capote gives her a help. Here I want to think about the viewpoint of this work. " I " talks about this work, recalling the past memory with Holly. " I " can speculate that Holly went to Brazil and Africa, but " I " doesn't know the truth exactly. " I " knows about her present condition from the rumor which Joe Bell tells. She appears to live in Africa, but this data is nothing but rumor. Readers cannot exactly know whether her life becomes calm and quiet or it becomes a more miserable one. The story develops from the speculation that a wooden doll<sup>3</sup> in the picture is similar to Holly, so that she may live in Africa.

About this point, the present Holly becomes a symbolic existence with narrator's recollection. Her existence is not based on real and certain information, but on mysterious and imaginary speculation in a sense. Capote does not necessarily give a negative evaluation of Holly. In the last scene, the narrator " I " explains about the cat which Holly kept like this.

But one day, one cold sunshiny Sunder winter afternoon,

it was. Franked by potted plants and framed by clean lace curtains, he was seated in the window of a warm-looking room: I wondered what his name was, for I was certain he had one now, certain he'd arrived somewhere he belonged. African hut or whatever, I hope Holly has, too. (100)

This cat is identified with Holly as mentioned in this paper. Holly's state is similar to this cat, so that she is affected by it and identified with it. " I " judges that this cat which represents Holly has found its home and been given a name already. Capote shows a aid for Holly in this scene because he makes Holly appear immediately after the explanation of the cat and the narrator hopes that Holly has found her own home place.

Holly is searching for others and changes, but Ihab Hassan explains that Holly continues to change, but " The[the] search for the other, who may be god, sweetheart, or father, ends in the discovery of the Self " (53). Eventually it is said that Holly's behavior to change and seek men attributes in her own self. Although she is within the jail of freedom, the aim of change is connected to the self-discovery as Hassan shows.<sup>4</sup>

Africa where Holly went also seems to shine a hopeful light. Needless to say, Africa is a place where humans originated from. Going to the place of origin can be thought as the metaphor

that Holly is seeking her identity, which is her reason for existence. She goes to Africa, the origin of human civilization, in order to clarify what should she do and where should she belong. Going for the place where human and civilization were born is an effort to discover the source of existence and real self by herself.

Is it dangerous that the “ I ” , Holly, and Capote are considered in the same line? “ I ” was an unknown would-be young writer when “ I ” lives a life with Holly. But from the context, the present “ I ” seems to live a life of writing. It is not irrelevant reasoning that Capote makes “ I ” overlap himself and also makes Holly play a similar projection to Capote, whose childhood was an unhappy like Holly's too. Garson points out the similarity between Capote and Holly like this.

Like Holly, Capote wanted “ permanence and stability, ” but in actuality Capote, like Holly, became something of a wanderer, a man who lived in many places in the world. Even though in his 20s he found a lifetime companion, Capote always considered himself as family-less and homeless wanderer. (88)

Capote , “ I ” , and Holly are in some ways projected with each other. Now “ I ” have an occupation of writing which was

a dream of youth. “ I ” write about Holly’s memoir in recalling style and hope that Holly has found her own place. From these explanation, it is clear that Capote gives an expectation and hope that Holly has found her happiness through the recollection which “ I ” writes about. He implies a hope for Holly whose life has been groundless and had been caught within the punishments of freedom. Her youth also can show that she has the possibility to have an expecting future.

### **Conclusion**

There are diverse structural devices in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. The wooden doll in the picture in Joe Bell’s shop gives Holly a kind of primitive and imaginary trait. This doll is something of a symbolic item in the work. Holly’s image is projected on it, and it appeal to so many men. With this symbolism, Holly also becomes a symbolic existence and enlarges her image of unreality, elusiveness, and freedom. Does unreality and freedom have anything common with nature? Unreality is freedom and transcendence from the established idea of reality. It can be said that if one is caught by reality, one is not being unreal. So there are things in common between unreality and freedom.

The contrary images to freedom , for example, Holly’s calling card “ travelling ” or her name “ Holly Golightly ” which implies that going lightly on holiday is a birdcage. She

asks that living things are never in it. The birdcage means a loss of freedom for Holly. The birdcage which hinders freedom for birds also suggests a hindrance of freedom for Holly. Therefore, she asks for not getting animals in it. Like these, there are some devices that give Holly a image of freedom.

I showed that Capote gave an aid to a heroine Holly who could not find self of her own and be suffering because of this freedom.

Here I want to answer to this paper's topic; why Capote gives the book the title named *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. It is clear from the argument mentioned above. This title represents a hope by Capote for Holly who is in the midst of a search for self and establishment. Capote hopes that Holly by herself meets the morning of hope in the brightening Tiffany's. That place is not necessarily the place where luxurious and high-grade things are abounded, but the place where she can find happiness and establishment for herself. For Holly that is the same place as with Tiffany's even though she may live a commonplace life, this is Tiffany's for her, which promises her a mental luxury. Capote gives for Holly a hint of mental happiness which can never be bought by material wealth. The morning at Tiffany's represents for Holly a start of action which implies that even just now she has begun to live a fortunate and truly happy life. This title is Capote's understanding, expectation, and kindness for weak and feeble

people, a type of life Capote himself experienced. Although he succeeded in his writer's career, he lived a stormy life, so that he had a humane kindness for the weak.

In this paper, I didn't give readings, such as political readings of 1950s or the expression of minimum sexuality in the book. Perhaps the minimum expression of sexuality in the text may be related to the stereotype of women in those days, though they are similar or different with each other. Capote's attitude towards these factors in 1950s may become the new ground for other readings.

### Notes

1. In this paper, reference to *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is based on the version, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* ed. Hamish Hamiltons.
2. The heroine's name Holly Golightly implies "going lightly on holiday". This expression makes readers feel free, witty, and smart. This is strongly related to the style of work.
3. Dolls and sexual image are often thought of in the same direction. For example, in Egypt the dead are buried with women dolls for the dead to enjoy sexual pleasure and to prevent sexual weakening in heaven. Furthermore, the sexual nature is related to fertility of crops. In the Elizabethan drama *Henry IV*, a doll is used to express prostitutes. In the work, Holly wears the sexual image and wooden doll emphasizes her image of it.

4. I agree to this idea, self-realization is enabled by having relationships with others. Self is clarified when one is positioned among others. I think how one is mirrored to them is one of the requirement for self-discovery.

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