Film Studies at Tiffany's: A Beginner's Guide to Film Studies

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This beginner's guide to film studies is divided into three chapters all focusing on the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. The first chapter conveys some background information about the production and personnel of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This information is a supplementary resource not found in the viewing experience. The second chapter looks at the film in terms of its star, Audrey Hepburn. This includes how Audrey Hepburn's persona is used for the purposes of the film. The third chapter looks at the film as an adaptation from an existing piece of literature. The chapter addresses criticism of the adaptation while finding some interesting parallels between the two works. The three chapters are followed by an extensive list of suggested readings and viewings to aid the reader in deeper study into Audrey Hepburn and film studies.

Acknowledgments

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The purpose of this book is to accumulate a variety of film knowledge in one place for the reader. This book uses a different approach than other film studies texts to enhance the experience for beginning readers. The book uses only one film as its reference point. This will allow the beginner to jump right into the world of film studies without numerous trips to the video store. The reader should watch the film before beginning the book. The film can be watched additional times to further flesh out the details of the book. This approach also appeals to another group of readers. The experienced film studies person will experience the book as a collection of essays that delve deeply into a particular area of film studies.
Chapter One: The Film

Plot Summary

The film Breakfast at Tiffany's follows the life of "not precisely a call-girl" played by Audrey Hepburn (Inge 141). The role of Holly Golightly is the one most tied up with the memory of Hepburn. The little black dresses and free-spirit of Golightly are synonymous for many with Audrey Hepburn. The film as a star vehicle for Hepburn will be discussed in Chapter Two. Breakfast at Tiffany's had first found fame as a novella by Truman Capote published in 1958. The adaptation of the work for the screen only three years after its release was fraught with controversy. The controversy and changes that took place in the adaptation are covered in Chapter Three of this book.

The plot of Breakfast at Tiffany's sticks closely to classical Hollywood narrative guidelines. At its most basic structure is the typical story of boy meets girl. Boy loses girl but regains her by the final fade-out. Breakfast at Tiffany's embellishes this basic plot by making the characters and the conflict a little different from the norm. Holly Golightly is not your average girl. In the film, she is considered to be a socialite who gets fifty dollars for the powder room and cab money for her many dates. This is a very antiseptic way of saying she is a call-girl. Censorship and mores of the audiences would not have allowed a film openly about a call-girl to be so light-hearted and romantic. Paul Varjak, played by George Peppard, is the boy to Audrey Hepburn's Holly Golightly girl. Paul, a struggling writer, is not without his own transgressions. He moves into a gaudily decorated apartment paid for by his unnamed suitor, whom he introduces as his decorator. The audience and Holly soon find out that the suitor...
played by Patricia Neal is really a rich society wife out for some fun. Early in the film, the audience and Holly see Neal’s character leave a large amount of cash for Paul while leaving his apartment late at night. Breakfast at Tiffany’s quickly becomes the story of kept man meets call-girl.

A number of conflicts ensue to keep Holly and Paul apart. Holly doesn’t want committed relationship with Paul. She doesn’t want anyone to put her in a cage. The film shows many ways in which she has spontaneously changed her mind. Her agent, O.J. Berman attest to the fact that Holly could have been an actress but suddenly changed her mind. The option of Holly as an actress takes some of the emphasis off the more prurient ways Holly earns her rent. Holly’s main ambition for much of the film is to marry for money, not love. She doesn’t care for physical appearance or personality. To top things off, Holly’s much older ex-husband shows up to reclaim her. Holly needs Paul’s help with this situation and this binds them closer while resulting in an argument.

Holly and Paul make up by spending a whole day doing things they have never done before. This takes them all around New York in a lovely montage sequence accompanied perfectly by Henry Mancini’s score. Paul takes Holly to the public library where she claims she has never been. Holly takes Paul to Tiffany’s where she goes whenever she gets the “mean reds.” At Tiffany’s, Paul suggests they have a ring from a Cracker Jack’s box engraved. This segment, like many others in romantic comedies, is where the audience and the couple’s feelings are cemented in love. The segment is capped off with a completely dialogue free jaunt through a five and dime to steal something. The scene is perfectly accompanied by a bouncy take on Henry Mancini’s score. The couple run out of the store while wearing stolen Halloween masks. This is followed by the inevitable perfectly framed and soft-focus kiss that the audience has
been waiting for.

More conflict soon arises to keep the story of Breakfast at Tiffany's progressing. Motivated by his love for Holly, Paul calls off his arrangement with the rich society woman. He finds Holly in the public library researching Brazil because of her new intention to marry Jose, the rich Brazilian. The music swells as the scene intensifies and Paul offers her his fifty dollar check for the powder room as the ultimate insult to their relationship. The following scenes show the progression of Holly and Jose’s romance and of Paul's avoidance of the two. Paul is called on once again to calm Holly after she hears her beloved brother has been killed. Paul bitterly leaves her apartment because she is no longer his responsibility.

An unspecified amount of time later, Holly invites Paul to her apartment for a farewell dinner before she leaves for Brazil with Jose. Upon returning from dinner, Holly is arrested for her naive involvement with a narcotics peddling gangster. Paul once again swoops in to save Holly from jail time and glaring press coverage. Jose sends a letter to call off his involvement with Holly because of her legal troubles. Paul and Holly argue over whether she should run away to Brazil or hide-out in New York. This begins an argument about their relationship ending with a memorable speech by Paul on how the two belong together regardless of Holly’s belief in cage. Paul throws the Tiffany’s engraved ring at Holly because he no longer wants it and vacates the cab to find Holly’s cat. Holly is changed by the sight of the ring and chases Paul out into the rain. After they find the cat, the couple are allowed to cling to each other and kiss in the pouring rain as "Moon River" swells and the camera pulls away.
Production Notes

Audiences who watched Breakfast at Tiffany’s in its original release in the theater brought different knowledge to the experience than audiences of today. Most would have known of the novella even if they had not read it themselves. Among the audience there would have been those that also questioned the casting choice of Audrey Hepburn for the lead role. Audrey Hepburn was most recently known in audiences minds for her roles in The Unforgiven and The Nun’s Story. The audience would have carried the idea of Audrey Hepburn as a Nun to the theaters with them. That audiences were accepting of Hepburn’s saint to sinner role choice is a testament to her very strong popularity. Her best actress Oscar nomination for The Nun’s Story would be followed up by a nomination for Breakfast at Tiffany’s. George Peppard was not very well known as a leading man when he costarred in Breakfast at Tiffany’s. Today’s audiences often remember Peppard from his role on the 1980’s TV show “The A-Team.”

Mickey Rooney’s portrayal of Mr. Yunioshi keeps the film from aging gracefully. One reviewer of the time period called, Mickey Rooney’s portrayal “a bit much” (Vermilye 152). A reviewer of today would decry his over-the-top portrayal as a horrible ethnic stereotype and generally bad casting. The audience knew Patricia Neal from various film roles. Buddy Ebsen as Doc was familiar to audience’s from his role on the television show “Davey Crockett.” Today’s audiences laugh because he is the country bumpkin from television’s “Beverly Hillbillies.” Martin Balsam who played the slick agent O.J. Berman would have been fresh in audience’s minds from his equally slick role in Psycho (1960). In an interesting side note that has little to do with the film but is good party trivia, Alan Reed who played Sally Tomato was also the voice
of Fred Flintstone.

Paramount Pictures released the film which had been produced by Martin Jurow and Richard Shepherd. George Axelrod adapted Capote's book only six years after working on the adaptation of his own play for the big screen which resulted in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) with Marilyn Monroe. Axelrod would write for Hepburn again in 1964's *Paris When it Sizzles*. The cinematographer Franz F. Planer had worked with Hepburn numerous times including her premiere role in *Roman Holiday* (1953). The director, Blake Edwards would later become known for the numerous Pink Panther films directed by him.

Two of the most memorable aspects of this film are the costumes and the music. Though Edith Head under contract with Paramount received top credit for the film's costumes, Hubert De Givenchy designed all of Hepburn's clothes. The little black dresses of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* became synonymous with Audrey Hepburn's chic style. Givenchy and Hepburn had been a costuming team since he created the fabulous Oscar winning gowns for *Sabrina* (1954). The soundtrack recording of the film won a 1962 Emmy. The fabulous score of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* earned composer Henry Mancini an Oscar. Best Song was won that year for "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* composed by Henry Mancini with lyrics by Johnny Mercer. Mancini orchestrated the scores for innumerable films including the future Pink Panther films of Blake Edwards. The film received Oscar nominations for Best Art Direction and Best Adapted Screenplay. The screenplay by Axelrod won an award for best adaptation from the Writers Guild of America.

The many awards and nominations received by *Breakfast at Tiffany's* are a great example of audience and critical reaction to the film. The previous works of
those involved with the film are interesting to note to give today's audiences a look at what contemporary audiences would have known. Knowing what the cast and crew has been up to since Breakfast at Tiffany's adds context and an opportunity to look at other works.
Chapter Two: The Star

How could one actress go from playing a nun to a playgirl and receive Oscar nominations for both of them? Well, Audrey Hepburn did with great success. Audrey Hepburn's acting in The Nun's Story is considered by some to be her strongest. This is often the opinion when a usually comedic actress is seen as stretching to play a serious role; for a modern example refer to Julia Roberts Oscar win for Erin Brockovich (2000). With Breakfast at Tiffany's, Hepburn returned to the romantic comedies that had made her famous. The marketing campaign for Breakfast at Tiffany's was geared towards Audrey Hepburn fans. On the DVD version of Breakfast at Tiffany's, Audrey Hepburn invites the audience to join her in the original theatrical trailer. The trailer closes with graphics on screen that say, “It's everything you've always wanted to do and Audrey Hepburn's the one you wanted to do it with.” The other actors and content of the film are overshadowed by Audrey Hepburn's persona. The marketers of the film and the audience of the time realized this was not just a romantic comedy; this was an Audrey Hepburn film.

Audrey Hepburn had won a Best Actress Oscar for her 1953 Hollywood debut in Roman Holiday. She had received two more Oscar nominations before the making of Breakfast at Tiffany's. Her award nominations corresponded with her popularity with audiences enabling her to carry Breakfast at Tiffany's. The producers of the film had enough faith in her marketability to center the film around her. Audiences best remember Hepburn for her comedic roles. By 1961, she had reached the status of becoming a personality comedian. Her role in Breakfast at Tiffany's benefited from audience's previous knowledge of Hepburn.
A personality comedian is defined by, “specific routines and/or variations of them that lend themselves to the establishing of the all-important screen comedy persona” (Gehring 2). A large part of any personality comedians persona is his or her appearance. Chaplin played a Tramp with funny mustache and ill-fitting clothes. Hepburn turned her unusual beauty into a comedic asset. Hepburn’s whole body was at odds with the conventional standards of America. Breakfast at Tiffany’s came out in the afterglow of the so-called mammary madness of the fifties. Hepburn’s body was unashamedly not a participant of this madness.

Hepburn’s body is fabulously clothed by Givenchy to make the most of her assets. Her little black dresses further defined the character. Hepburn is most often described by reviewers and biographers as ‘spitelike’ and ‘gamine.’ The New York Times review of Breakfast at Tiffany’s references her “startled-faun exterior” in portraying an “amoral pixie” (Vermilye 154). She puts these usual comparisons to work for her in her portrayal of Holly Golightly. Upon seeing the rich men Mag Wildwood brings to her party, Hepburn stalks toward them with eyes wide and cigarette holder at the ready. Her walk has an ironic humor to it because of the lack of large swiveling hips that usually accompany such posturing. The cigarette holder becomes part of Hepburn’s schtick for this film. The cigarette holder is especially important in the above mentioned party scene. Hepburn uses the holder to gesture and even causes a small fire with it. A New York Times article about the production of Breakfast at Tiffany’s quotes the director as saying Truman Capote had advised that they watch the use of the cigarette holder and, “not come too close to Auntie Mame” (Archer).

Hepburn’s eyes and face were the main proponents of her comedy. Sunglasses were used in Breakfast at Tiffany’s to create an edit within the frame for a
dramatic unveiling of her doe eyes. Hepburn widens her eyes for further emphasis of her dialogue. In her first meeting with Paul Varjak Holly tells him, “You can always tell what kind of a girl a man thinks you are by the earring he gives you,” then holding up a particularly gaudy pair she says “The mind reels.” This is made even funnier because of her vocal intonation and her eyes. She bugs out her already large eyes to express the joke even better. Hepburn's eyes are frequently returned to in the film. A shot of another character is usually accompanied by a shot of Hepburn looking at that character. The five and dime scene is carried out without dialogue. Hepburn frequently looks directly at people in the store giving them a completely innocent look. Her looks to the audience and Peppard are less than innocent. The audience is amused that this seemingly innocent girl has stealing on her mind.

Hepburn's unique voice serves her best in Breakfast at Tiffany's. The audience is not sure of her nationality until her agent O.J. Berman reveals to Paul that she used to sound like a “hillbilly or an Okie,” so they gave her French lessons. This explains away the confusing nationality of her accent and allows Holly drops French phrases into her speech regularly. Her voice and intonation add to the facade of sophistication that surrounds Holly. The audience is lured by her voice. When she is angry her voice drops rather than rises. The humor of her dialogue comes from the timing of her delivery as much as the writing. She can say nearly caustic things with such innocence that the audience can laugh. She tells Paul that she is his agent since he already has a decorator, no one is offended by this reference to his affair because of the gleeful way she delivers the line.

Physical comedy in Breakfast at Tiffany's can come from a breakdown of the grace of Hepburn. Holly gets very drunk with Paul after her ex-husband leaves. Paul heaves her over his shoulder to carry her up to her apartment. Hepburn's slight frame
makes this all the more amusing because the audience doesn't think Peppard is under any strain to carry her. Yunioshi's outrage at her disturbance is met with Holly's catlike narrowing of eyes and spritzing of perfume much like a cat's hiss. She continues her speech by saying, "As Miss Golightly was saying before she was so rudely interrupted." She draws out the word rudely making it more humorous in her unique voice. Entering her apartment, she stumbles about which is in direct contrast to her sober grace for much of the movie.

The other female characters in Breakfast at Tiffany's are no real threat to Holly Golightly or Audrey Hepburn. The bridesmaids shall not outshine the bride as they say. The other females are cloaked in the cinematic equivalent of the hideous bridesmaid dress. Mag Wildwood is a near lesbian caricature. She is of a staggering height and gets so drunk at the party that she falls over to Holly's accompanying "Timber." The Wildwood character is marginalized to the party scene. Patricia Neal's society woman practically cackles with evil. Her costumes are designed with swinging capes that make her even more witchlike. When Paul admits that he has fallen in love with Holly, Neal downplays it and offers him some money for a vacation. The unseen "queen of the pig people" who marries Rusty Trawler instead of Holly only won him because of her money.

Many feminist critics in revisiting Audrey Hepburn's roles point to her as an interesting actress to study because of her physical differences to the "mammary woman" of the time (Rosen 285). Feminist praise the roles of Audrey Hepburn for being stronger than the norm. Molly Haskell says Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly, "never swallowed their pride, exploited their sexuality or made fools of themselves over men" (253). Holly Golightly is very much a character who makes decisions on her own terms. She is an admitted gold-digger which for all its negativity was a very
ambitious statement for the early sixties female. As with many of her roles, Hepburn balances naivete with strength.

She has enough strength for a female audience to identify with her. Yet, she shows enough fragility for Paul to want to protect her. Part of her persona makes the male want to step in and protect her from harm. This another difference from her and her contemporary and box office competitor, Marilyn Monroe. Males viewed both of them as fragile but wanted to exploit Marilyn and shelter Hepburn. At only a year older than Hepburn, Peppard was one of Hepburn's few co-stars of a corresponding age. The preponderance for a father figure in Hepburn's films comes through the role of Doc, her ex-husband in Breakfast at Tiffany's. He is originally mistaken for her father rather than her ex-husband.

Though her character is really a prostitute critics and audiences alike loved the role of Holly Golightly for Audrey Hepburn. Hepburn successfully carried the film because of her well-established screen persona. She carried her persona with her from film to film adjusting it as necessary for the storyline. Even today's audiences without prior knowledge of Hepburn's persona are charmed by her portrayal of Holly Golightly.
Chapter Three: The Adaptation

The novella Breakfast at Tiffany's by Truman Capote was a best-seller when it was first published in 1958. The story of Holly Golightly, "not precisely a call-girl," was read and adored by many Americans (Inge 141). Whenever a beloved piece of literature is made into a film, comparisons between the two will be made. The film version of Breakfast at Tiffany's gave some reviewers the "mean reds" over changes that were made. One critic in response to the ending of the film said, "Truman Capote's novella has been vulgarized." (Feinstein 68). I feel the changes made in the adaptations were not without merit. The film retains the basic characters and pulls some exact dialogue from the novella. Further controversy has surrounded this film because of the casting of Audrey Hepburn in the main role.

George Axelrod wrote the screenplay for Breakfast at Tiffany's without the collaboration of Truman Capote. This change of authors leads one to expect some changes in the script. The most arguable change is the conclusion of the film. The ending is contrived to fit with the structure of a Hollywood romance. The two main characters must unite to live happily ever after by the final fade out. This is the case in the film version of Breakfast at Tiffany's. Holly Golightly and Paul Varjak close the film with a passionate kiss.

This is in complete discord with Truman Capote's novella. In the novella, Paul is the unnamed observer of Holly's wild adventures. No romantic relationship takes place between the two. Nor is he a "kept man" as he is in the film. The narrator of the novella is a struggling writer who does live above Holly. The two are friends and he does help her in her time of need. But, the trip to the airport ends with Holly fleeing the
country and Paul never seeing her again. He is reminded of her by a bartender who was a mutual friend of theirs. The bartender relates a secondhand sighting of her in Africa.

Before, she left she asked that he find a home for her no name cat. He sees the cat one day behind the window of a nice building with lace curtains. He knows the cat has found somewhere to belong and wonders if Holly has also found that place. The cat is also used in the film's conclusion. Paul leaves the cab after making a grand speech about love and searches for Cat. Holly, now changed by his speech, also looks for the cat. It is only after she finds Cat that they can passionately kiss.

The film avoids much of the talk of sex and sexuality that was prevalent in the novella. A lot of this would have had to be cut because of the censorship of the production code. The novella Holly frequently gives her opinion of homosexuality. She considers Rusty Trawler to be a latent homosexual. To clear up a messy situation, she tells Mag Wildwood, her roommate in the novella, that she is a lesbian and therefore would not have slept with Rusty. While, these comments did not make it to the big screen, homosexual allusions are still made. Rusty Trawler stills fits the description and homosexual allusions given to him in the novel. In the film, the character of Mag Wildwood is more masculine than some of the men at the party. She is a towering figure who drinks too much and threatens to feed Rusty to the yaks.

Holly Golightly survives the film without one unwanted pregnancy. This is not true of the book. Holly becomes pregnant by Jose and for this reason is going to Brazil with him as in the film. A marriage is assumed by both Holly’s but never promised. The miscarriage coincides with her arrest and Jose’s dissolution of their relationship. The baby does not become an issue in the novella but an illegitimate pregnancy would not have been looked upon lightly by censors of the film version.
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The film is not without it's transgressions. Holly may be a call-girl but it is veiled. Paul on the other hand is a definite kept man of a rich and married society woman. I believe part of the novella Holly, has been transferred to Paul to make her character more likable. A male gigolo must have been easier for audiences to take than just a female prostitute. When Holly sneaks into his room for their first meeting, his mistress has just left. Upon seeing, the money on the table Holly asks, "Is that by the week, the hour, or the what?" This shows her own lack of innocence but further points out his. The literary Paul is more worried about avoiding the draft and finding a job as a writer to have sexual escapades.

Some characters from the novella survived the adaptation and parts of others show up elsewhere. The bartender in the novella has been absorbed by O.J. Berman in the film. The Berman character is given more time and lines in the film than the novella. The disgruntled spirit of Madame Sapphia Spanella lives on in the Mr. Yunioshi of the film. Rather, than have many neighbors angered by Holly's actions the film combines them all in Mr. Yunioshi. Mickey Rooney plays Mr. Yunioshi as a horrible ethnic stereotype that is cajoled and angered by Holly. Rooney's character gets to deliver the line originated by the fictional Madame Spanella, "Here she is the wanted woman!" Mag Wildwood's role in the film is reduced to the cocktail party scene of the film. Her character remains true to her description; "Even the stutter, certainly genuine but still a bit laid on, had been turned to advantage." (Capote 44). The over the top creation of Mag Wildwood started in the novella not in Hollywood. Regardless of the tweakings in characters, the vital characters show up in one form or another in the film adaptation.

Along with characters some of Capote's dialogue shows up unaltered in the film. Mr. Arbuckle is once again dismissed by Holly with the comment that she
“worships” him. Holly’s manner of speaking in the film comes directly from the novella. French phrases such as “Pourquoi pas?” drop into her speech in the book and film. Part of Holly’s disarming charm comes from the way she talks to people. Everyone is called “Darling” with equal charm in the book and film. In her moments of anguish and anger, the screen Holly can’t use the four-letter words that pop up in book; the instances of “golly gee” and such phrases are increased to make up for it.

Some plot points are carried from the book to the film. Holly’s history remains much the same. Her former ‘husband’ Doc shows up to bring her home and tells Paul he needs a “friend.” Doc is sent home in the novella without Paul’s help. Paul is there to reassure her when her brother Fred dies, in different circumstances in the book and film. Her visits to Sally Tomato have the same legal troubles in the book and film.

Holly’s ambition to marry for money rather than love, is more focused in the film. In the novella, Holly is after money but the marriage aspect is a less intense. In both versions, Holly is a girl searching for a place to belong and not succeeding. The narrator of the novella mentions that she cannot go past the zoo because she cannot bear to see animals in cages. She has these same feelings to cages in the film. Both Holly's compare themselves to wild things that can't be loved or barred in. Neither Holly can give the cat a name because they do not belong to each other. In the novella, Holly is still searching for her home. The film leaves you with the feeling that she will stay with Paul and leave the cage she has built for herself.

The famous fire escape singing episode comes directly from the novella. In the novella, Paul observes Holly singing and strumming on the fire escape while her hair dries. He says that she knew all the showtunes, and hits; but sometimes she played wandering tunes that made him wonder where she came from. One of these “harsh-tender wandering tunes” had lyrics that said “Don’t wanna sleep, Don’t wanna die,
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Just wanna go a-travelin' through the pastures of the sky” (Capote 16). Her singing adds to the fragility of her character. It softens the hardness of her literary persona. This tune shows up again to connect her to Doc. It is from this we learn of her earlier connection to the South. In the film, “Moon River” takes the place of the wandering tune. The song is achingly wistful while not being specifically southern. “Moon River” is used as a musical motif throughout the film in an expanded form of the other songs use in the novel. The melody is manipulated to fit into various scenes. The film opens and closes with the swells of an orchestral “Moon River.” The instrumental “Moon River” plays quietly in the background of emotional scenes. The tune is set to a cha-cha rhythm for the raucous cocktail party. The song and it’s lyrics of a “Huckleberry Friend” will be forever tied to the film and to Audrey Hepburn. Like the novella song, “Moon River” adds a gentle yearning to Holly Golightly.

Another scene from the novella is kept but altered to reflect the more innocent Holly. The raucous cocktail party scene is what one reviewer considered to be the “peak” of the film (Vermylye 153). It is one of the most comedic moments of the film. The novella’s party has one drastic difference in the population of the party. Holly invited only men and the men all assumed they were the only ones invited. Paul in the film is surprised to find that he has been invited to a party and not a personal interlude. Eventually more men and women show up to fill the party. The men of the novella fill Holly’s apartment despite the fact that there are no other women there besides Holly. The Holly of the novella shows her cruel side when Mag Wildwood crashes the party as she does in the film. Mag accuses Holly of hoarding men and angers Holly with her presence. While Mag is in the bathroom, Holly deflates her presence by mentioning that she looks “clean” and it was a shame, “But then, I hear so many of these Southern girls have the same problem.” (Capote 45). Holly quickly reasserts herself as the
center of all male’s attention by destroying her opponent’s reputation. The party in the film is more of a get-together rather than a collection of Holly’s admirers. The film party ends with Paul and Jose fleeing from the police. This does not happen in the novel but is used to clue the audience into Jose’s publicity shy demeanor.

An incident from the novel is changed around to reflect the romantic relationship of the film. In the novella, Holly and Paul exchange gifts; a birdcage for Paul and a St. Christopher medal from Tiffany’s for Holly. Paul and Holly’s trip to Tiffany’s and resultant engraved ring does not take place in the novella. Their gift exchange is spontaneous and unromantic in the novella. The trip to Tiffany’s and resulting ring is a definite romantic gesture by the screenwriter. The ring can then be used at the end as one more thing to convince Holly that Paul loves her.

Truman Capote’s writing is very descriptive of the people and the settings of Holly’s adventures. His writing lends itself to a clear mental picture of whatever he describes. These mental pictures and descriptions are brought to life in the reality of the film. Even the outside shots of New York, seem to conform to Capote’s memories. Not only are the sets constructed to resemble what Capote wrote; but the characters also seem to be true Capote creations. Rusty Trawler is described in the novella as a “middle-aged child that had never shed its baby fat”. He is played on the screen by the plump Stanley Adams. Mag Wildwood and O.J. Berman use the same dialogue as the novel. The actors fulfill the physical description made by Truman Capote.

Truman Capote’s opinion on the film adaptation has been notoriously negative. His main objections were to the happy tone of the film and the choice for lead actress. He described the film as a “mawkish valentine to New York City and Holly” (Inge 159). Truman Capote told an interviewer that Marilyn Monroe was his first choice for the part; “But Paramount doublecrossed me and gave the part to Audrey Hepburn” (Inge 317).
Capote and Monroe had met and became friends right from the start. Their close friendship added towards his feelings about casting. He said, “Holly had to have something touching about her...unfinished” and elaborated that, “Marilyn had that” (Inge 317). It seems that Capote’s now famous statement of preference for Marilyn was clouded by his friendship with her.

By choosing his friend, Capote himself was ignoring his novella description of Holly. In Breakfast at Tiffany’s, the narrator describes Holly as he first saw her:

She was still on the stairs, now she reached the landing and the ragbag colors of her boy’s hair, tawny streaks, strands of albino-blond and yellow, caught the hall light. It was a warm evening, nearly summer, and she wore a slim cool black dress, black sandals, a pearl choker. For all her chic thinness, she had an almost breakfast-cereal air of health, a soap and lemon cleanliness, a rough pink darkening in the cheeks. Her mouth was large, her nose upturned. A pair of dark glasses blotted out her eyes. It was a face beyond childhood, yet this side of belonging to a woman. I thought her anywhere between sixteen and thirty; as it turned out she was shy two months of her nineteenth birthday. (Capote 12)

This description details the physical characteristics of Audrey Hepburn. Audrey Hepburn was famous for her extreme thinness. The guesses toward Holly’s age because of the youth of her face, is the most striking statement to me. Hepburn frequently played characters much younger than her actual age. Gamine, spritely, and ingenue are the terms used to describe her. One reviewer described Hepburn’s Holly as an “amoral pixie” (Vermilye 154).

The only difference from Capote’s description of Holly and Hepburn’s incarnation of Holly is their eyes. The Holly of the novel wears dark glasses most of the time or she must squint to see. Hepburn’s eyes are a large asset to her; therefore they would not be hidden behind dark glasses. Large sunglasses are part of the movie wardrobe, but are taken down to have Hepburn’s large eyes peer over them.
Her eyes become another part of her charm and comedy.

The clothing described in this scene is also faithfully recreated in Breakfast at Tiffany's. Holly's cool black dress is now famous. Givenchy designed all of Miss Hepburn's outfits with her specifically in mind. It seems that Givenchy must have also read the novella and gained ideas from there. Hepburn wears two black summer dresses as described by Capote. She accessorizes them with a large pearl choker as in the novella. The black dress becomes a symbol for her chicness in the novella and film. Because film adds a visual aspect unlike literature, the black dress becomes a greater symbol of Holly than it ever could become in the novella.

Had the role been played by Marilyn Monroe, the preceding physical description would no longer be valid. Monroe's body was hour glassed shape and was as much a part of her persona as Hepburn's thinness. In her other films, Monroe's clothes are incredibly tight fitting to show off her curves and color coordinated to match her platinum blonde hair. Her dresses are usually white or a striking red; rarely black. The slim black dress would have to be replaced by something tighter and brighter for Marilyn. Nor does, Monroe have the young face required for the role. She did not look older than she was by any means; but she was lacking the youthful innocence that Holly Golightly needed.

Not only does Hepburn fit the physical description better than Monroe, the role fits her persona better. Even the author himself admitted to an interviewer, "Audrey was not what I had in mind when I wrote that part, although she did a terrific job" (Inge 317). Hepburn had done many films before Breakfast at Tiffany's, she was probably still in the audience's memories from her role in Love in the Afternoon (1957). She played Ariane a young girl who falls in love with a much older and much more experienced man. It seems odd to compare these two roles; one of such innocence
and the other of such promiscuity. Holly Golightly is young and for all of her experience she is still searching for something, much like Ariane in *Love in the Afternoon*. In one factor, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was an unusual role for Hepburn. Her costar was actually close to her own age. Usually, Hepburn played opposite much older men because of their "matching vulnerability" according to one historian (Haskell 14). The characters in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* match in their vulnerability because of their similar "occupations" rather than age difference.

The Holly Golightly of the novella and film is an independent person. The majority of Marilyn Monroe's characters are ditzy to put it bluntly. Her characters have a confused quality about them that wouldn't have worked for Holly Golightly. Her characters are free with their sexuality which would have added another dimension to the Holly Golightly character. Yet, I think Monroe's more overt sexuality would have made Holly less likable. The audience loved Holly Golightly as portrayed by Hepburn; with Monroe as Golightly the audience would have a different reaction. Monroe's characterization would have lost the innocent and fragile quality that Holly needs to be sympathetic to the audience.

Monroe and Hepburn have different comic styles that would have been evident in her portrayal. Monroe uses her body for comedy, teasing the audience. Hepburn uses her eyes for comedy. Monroe can also throw out lines filled with innuendo with far more meaning than Hepburn. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Audrey Hepburn says, "You can always tell what kind of a person a man really thinks you are by the kind of earrings. I must say the mind reels." She conveys the deeper meaning of what she is seeing by widening out her eyes. The same line delivered by Monroe in her more obvious manner might have gotten them in trouble with the censors.

The censorship of the production code could be blamed as a motivating factor
in the changes that took place to adapt *Breakfast at Tiffany's* for the screen. The overt sexual content of the novella had to be toned down for the audiences of 1961. This caused some changes in the plot and dialogue. The choice of actress made the character of Holly softer and more fragile. This fragility is not without base in the novella. Capote's descriptive writing style is transformed into the screen portrayal. His character's physical descriptions were instrumental in the casting of the actors. His description of Holly Golightly more readily applies to Audrey Hepburn; than Marilyn Monroe whom he wanted for the role. Despite any changes made in the story of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the overall look and feel of the film is true to the spirit of Capote's novella.
Suggested Readings

Audrey Hepburn Biographies

Excellent reference tool. Extensively detailed filmography and bibliography.

Notable only for the amount of photos and introduction by Hubert De Givenchy. Other content is mostly fluff about clothing rather than Audrey Hepburn's life.

Notable only because of controversy. The book alleges that AH was anorexic and that she cooperated with the book via phone interviews. Her family disagrees with the books claims and has brought a lawsuit against the author.

Thorough biography completed with cooperation of family and friends of AH. Includes some rare photos and a thorough bibliography.

Good reference guide to cast and crew of all of AH's films. Includes contemporary reviews of films.

Less intensive biography of Audrey Hepburn.

**Audrey Hepburn Articles**


**Truman Capote References**


**General Film Studies**


French philosopher attempts to explain why things are funny.


Basic introduction to film as art.


Attempts to define various genres.


Affectionate feminist film theory.


Handy reference book of names and terms.

Websites

The Internet Movie Database. www.imdb.com

Quick reference tool containing cast and crew information of practically every movie ever made.

The Academy Awards Database. www.oscars.org/ampas

Searchable database of every nomination and winner.

Suggested Viewings

Roman Holiday (1953) - AH’s Hollywood premiere as a Princess out for a day of fun.

Sabrina (1954) - AH undergoes a Cinderella like transformation to win the heart of William Holden only to fall in love with Humphrey Bogart. The costumes are Givenchy at his best. Directed by Billy Wilder.

Love in the Afternoon (1955) - AH and Gary Cooper unbelievable but still entertaining. Directed by Billy Wilder.

Seven Year Itch (1955) - Based off of George Axelrod’s play. Adapted and directed by Billy Wilder. Notice the contrast of Wilder’s humor with Marilyn Monroe with AH in Sabrina or Love in the Afternoon.

The Nun’s Story (1959) - Dramatic and moving AH as a Nun questioning her vows.

Pretty Woman (1990) - A more straightforward fairy tale of a prostitute played by Julia Roberts.

Erin Brockovich (2000) - Julia Roberts plays a more dramatic role and receives an Oscar.