

**Bojana Gledić\***  
Faculty of Philology  
University of Belgrade  
Serbia

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## **CHOOSING OTHERNESS OVER THE OTHER IN TRUMAN CAPOTE'S *BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S***

### **Abstract**

One of the most iconic images ever associated with New York City is that of Audrey Hepburn in her little black dress having a Danish and coffee in front of Tiffany's Fifth Avenue flagship store at dawn. However, the original Holiday Golightly is nothing like her famed avatar. Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* presents a world of patriarchy and imperialism where Holly is the disruptive Other who escapes the margin to appropriate and subvert the hegemonic culture. In the eyes of men, she is slightly elevated above the "true" Others who in Capote's story resemble Constantine Cavafy's barbarians. This paper examines the (post)colonial aspect of Truman Capote's novella, with special emphasis on otherness, mimicry, and colonial desire.

**Key words:** Holly Golightly, Truman Capote, otherness, mimicry, colonial desire

### **1. The legend**

As far as American popular movie culture is concerned, one of the most iconic images ever associated with New York City is that of Audrey Hepburn in her little black dress having a Danish and coffee in front of Tiffany's Fifth Avenue flagship store at dawn as the opening sequence to Blake Edwards' romantic comedy "Breakfast at Tiffany's". The movie starts with a pale blue dawn emerging over Manhattan, as a taxi halts on Fifth Avenue, leaving its only customer in front of Tiffany's. Wearing what will become known in decades to come as *the* little black dress (designed especially for Audrey Hepburn by Hubert de Givenchy (1927-2018)) the main protagonist approaches the window and slowly starts to have her breakfast. The movie was well-received at the time, even being nominated for five Academy Awards in 1962, of which it won two (Best Original Score and Best Original Song for "Moon River").

In the decades since the release of the movie, Holly has come to be considered almost a real person. When walking in New York City, one can see images of her in store windows, along with those of real-life former residents, such as John Lennon (1940-

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\* Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, Studentski trg 3, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia; e-mail: bojanadgledic@gmail.com, bojana.gledic@fil.bg.ac.rs

1980) or Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962). It is a curious fact that in those photographs it is never Audrey Hepburn (1929-1993) in another role or as herself, but always as Holly. The “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” movie was released in 1961, and it shifted the time of the novel’s plot (the 1940s) to the 1960s, but the legend has lived on more than half a century later, and will probably continue to go on living in the decades to come. The movie version of Holly Golightly will probably forever be associated with the willowy, bejewelled, doe-eyed beauty in the little black dress or with her unforgettable performance while singing “Moon River” in the window of a brownstone. And even though the little black dress was first designed by Coco Chanel (1883-1971) during the Depression Era, for many it was Holly Golightly who made it famous.<sup>1</sup> Holly has left an indelible mark on American popular culture and has made Tiffany’s the go-to store for shopping expensive jewellery. Her enormous and undying popularity was further proven by the fact that, since November 2017, you can actually have breakfast at Tiffany’s<sup>2</sup>, and you should make a reservation well in advance for a seat in their Blue Box Cafe.<sup>3</sup>

But how was Holly conceived of, originally? Did her creator intend to make her a legend? Although Truman Capote is remembered for his shocking descriptions of people who were generally considered outcasts at the time, and although he was proud of his different writing style, the answer to this question would unequivocally be *No*. It is a well-known fact that Capote was outraged by the changes made to his novella in the movie script. The original Holiday Golightly is nothing like her famed avatar, and Capote’s novella is nothing like the movie classic.<sup>4</sup> Capote’s story of *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, true to the time in which it was written (1958), and the time it relates to (1943), takes the reader to a world of patriarchy and imperialism in which binary oppositions rule and success is equated with rich white men while women are colonized subjects. Holly’s role in the plot is neither glamorous nor appealing; on the contrary, she is a puppet in the hands of men, a poor uneducated creature being tutored by the school of life. Capote has been accused of developing characters that have little to do with the real world (Aldridge 1951: 104–105; 218–219) and Holly would definitely fall under this category. In the real world, a character like hers would most probably suffer a much darker demise. It was probably for this reason, in addition to certain policies of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/fashion/little-black-dress-524293>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/11/travel/tiffany-and-co-jewelry-breakfast-audrey-hepburn.html> or <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/2017/11/09/now-you-really-can-have-breakfast-tiffanys/847879001/>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-gastronomy/you-cant-have-breakfast-at-tiffanys> or <https://www.post-gazette.com/life/fashion/2018/02/28/Breakfast-at-Tiffany-Co-Blue-Box-Cafe-New-York-City-how-to-get-a-reservation/stories/201802280055>

<sup>4</sup> For interesting differences between the two, see Krämer (2004).

that time, that changes had been made to the script; changes believed to be necessary in order for the movie to be successful, which it certainly was.

It remains unclear up to this day who the real-life inspiration behind the character of Holly was, as Capote often changed his statements in his desire to appear mysterious. In his interview with "Playboy" magazine in 1968 he told Eric Norden the following:

... the real Holly was a German refugee who arrived in New York at the beginning of the war, when she was 17 years old. Very few people were aware of this, however, because she spoke English without any trace of an accent. She had an apartment in the brownstone where I lived and we became great friends. Everything I wrote about her is literally true—not about her friendship with a gangster called Sally Tomato and all that, but everything about her personality and her approach to life, even the most apparently preposterous parts of the book. (Norden 1968)

Perhaps Holly being in possession of the original 4711 cologne (from Cologne) or her using the German word *schluffen* at one point (in addition to the "posh" French words she sprinkles her language with) could be "proof" of this claim (Capote 1971: 90, 92). In the interview, Capote goes on to say that his real-life Holly really did disappear into Portuguese Africa and was never heard from again and after the war a well-known song lyricist and writer, John La Touche, really did travel to the Belgian Congo to make a documentary film when he discovered a wooden head carving of the girl in a remote village. However, in spite of these claims, many believe that Holly's character was based on someone from Capote's personal life or his wide circle of famous friends whom he spent time with while living in New York City. According to Capote's biographer, Gerald Clarke, it could have been one of various socialites of the time (Gloria Vanderbilt (1924-2019) or Oona O'Neill (1925-1991), to give just a couple of examples), it could have been Capote's mother, it could even have been Capote himself (Clarke 2010). Perhaps we will never know. But what we do know is that Capote wanted Marilyn Monroe to play the part of Holly. This could, perhaps, be due to the fact that Capote regarded Marilyn as a timeless beauty, but also somewhat of a tragic character. In his observations in *The Dogs Bark: Public People and Private Places* he describes Monroe as "a waif-figure of saucy pathos", an orphan "stained, and illuminated by, the stigmata of orphan-thinking" who makes people feel "flattered, pitying, aroused" (Capote 1977: 379), which indeed does sound like the Holly in his version of the story. Considering Holly's love of apples, perhaps Capote conceived of her as the quintessential woman.

## 2. The author behind the legend

In order to understand the character of Holly better, along with the story of the original *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, it is imperative to say a few words about their author, Mr. Capote himself. Truman Capote (1924-1984) was born Truman Streckfus Persons in New Orleans, Louisiana, and educated in New York City and Connecticut. He was born into unfortunate family circumstances and had an unhappy childhood. His mother, Lillie Mae Faulk (who would later change her name to Nina), gave birth to him while she was still a teenager, and his parents divorced when he was very young. He was sent to live with relatives in Monroeville, Alabama, where he met the future author Harper Lee (1926-2016), who would remain his friend throughout adulthood. He rejoined his mother a few years later when she married for the second time, and he changed his name to Truman García Capote, taking his stepfather's family name. This was a period of wealth and security when Capote lived in New York City and Connecticut, residing at such glamorous addresses as Riverside Drive or Park Avenue. His stepfather was rich, but his wealth fluctuated as he was accused of fraud and embezzlement and Capote's personal life had its highs and lows. However, the glamorous life in those better times left a lasting impression on the aspiring author, which would later become evident in the topics he dealt with in his fiction.

Truman Capote began writing as a very young boy, as he was very lonely in Monroeville. He started by writing short stories and would later move on to longer pieces of fiction. At the very end of his formal education in New York City, Capote started doing menial jobs at "The New Yorker" and he worked there for two years until he was fired for angering the famous American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) while attending the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont in 1944. Accounts of what exactly happened at this event differ, but it seems that Capote was sitting in the front row at Frost's reading and at one point had to leave while the poet was speaking. This apparently enraged Frost and he complained about it to the editor of the "The New Yorker", consequently getting Capote fired. Naturally, Capote remembered this event in his own way, calling Frost "an old bastard, if ever there was one", accusing him of thinking that Capote was not "a sufficiently humble worshiper at the altar of his ego" (Capote 1977: 413). However, Capote did think that in the long run Frost had done him a favour, because it was then that he sat down and wrote his first novel. In time, Capote would become a novelist, a screenwriter and a playwright, writing seventeen books of fiction and non-fiction before his death of liver disease when he was fifty-nine years old. All his life Truman Capote was perceived as somewhat of a curious character; he was introverted, quiet and effeminate. He immersed his otherness in the flamboyant diversity of New York City. During his life, many believed that his interest in tragic stories was just another whim of a boy who came from a privileged background,

but one might argue that they did not take into account all the facts pertaining to his background. Regardless of his fame and success, deep down Capote probably felt very alienated due to the difference of his appearance and manner (he is quoted as saying that if he could be anything, he would most like to be invisible, or invisible at will (Capote 1977: 417)). In fact, we do not actually know that much about him, other than the fact that he was a very reserved, although eccentric, individual who gave conflicting statements about his opinions and preferences throughout his life and career. What we do know is that he preferred New York City to any other place on Earth, he liked to be alone, he liked finely made cars and lonely motels, he could not stand the idea of suburban middle class life and if he had not become a writer he would have been a lawyer (Capote 1977: 405–419).

In his literary career, Truman Capote was compared to some great authors; in his early writing to William Faulkner (1897-1962), due to their connection with the South (for example, Вукчевић 2018: 505) or the “gothic” element in their writings (for example, Bloom 2009: 43-56 or Long 2008: 42). He was also compared to Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) due to their character (for example, Aldridge 1951: 200) or their die-hard bohemian lifestyle (Ivanišević 1986: 87) as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) due to their charm (Ivanišević 1986: 87) or their use of “a marginal narrator-observer with a charismatic central character” (Long 2008: 75). Truman Capote’s literary career could roughly be divided into three phases, the first being at the end of the fifth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when he wrote *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948) a coming-of-age story involving a homosexual adolescent. This phase of his writing was characterized by gothic elements, and he wrote about the fantastic and the bizarre. The next phase arrived in the 1950s, crowned by *Breakfast at Tiffany’s: A Short Novel and Three Stories* in 1958, and during this decade Capote engaged in retrospective storytelling, presenting memories and “bittersweet melancholy” (Ivanišević 1986: 90). In his third phase, during the 1960s, Capote started something that was dubbed “New Journalism”: “His intent was to bring ‘the art of the novelist together with the technique of journalism’” (Geyh, Leebron and Levy 1998: 127, quoting Capote in his interview to “Newsweek’s” Jack Kroll in 1966). In this last period Capote wrote his most controversial novel, *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences* (1965), which took six years and more than six thousand pages of notes to complete (Geyh, Leebron and Levy 1998: 127). Had it not been for Audrey Hepburn’s interpretation of Holly, we dare say that *In Cold Blood* would have been Capote’s most famous piece of writing. And although in the eyes of the average reader Capote will always be remembered for gifting Holly to the world, *In Cold Blood* is still considered his most original and valuable work as far as literary criticism is concerned. After this novel, Capote published one more notable piece,

*Music for Chameleons: New Writing* (1983), before his untimely death in 1984. A work he left unfinished would be published posthumously as *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel* in 1986.

### 3. The dark side of the legend

In his study of Truman Capote, Robert Emmet Long described *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as a break from Capote's previous work, saying that it captured "the mood and moment, the mise en scène of New York during the postwar years" (Long 2008: 84). In *Bloom's Modern Critical Views* the novel was described as being "social" (Bloom 2009: 13). Today, we may safely claim that, had it not been for the widely popular movie, the novel itself probably would not have amounted to greater acclaim (it was "so rococo", fading away "into pastel shades" (Bloom 2009: 2)). From the onset of his literary career, some critics were unsure whether Capote would remain a relevant author (for example, Aldridge 1951: 256–257), but in most compendiums of American literature he will most certainly be mentioned for *In Cold Blood* which, as we have stated, remains his most relevant piece. As a consequence, not a great deal has been written about *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and it has mostly been studied and reviewed from the aspects of film studies and gender and/or queer studies. Having watched the movie, we wondered about the curious fact that the author of such a dark and troubling novel, *In Cold Blood*, also wrote what to us seemed like a lighthearted and funny piece, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. We approached the novel expecting just that, a funny story about the adventures of a quirky young woman whom Capote himself described as an American geisha (Norden 1968). And although some authors do point out that "there is an edge of sadness in Capote's often lighthearted fable" because Holly yearns "for a perfection that cannot be realized" (Long 2008: 89), what we found most shocking in Capote's version is the apparent binary structure of the World War II society in New York City and the echoes of imperialistic policy present throughout the story. The realm of success belongs to rich white men and the existing hegemonies make little or no room for anyone else. In this kind of setting, Holly becomes somewhat of a disruptive element. She is the Other, escaping the margin and trying to reach the centre. She follows what she believes is the path to success, appropriating and subverting the hegemonic culture by mimicking a cosmopolitan woman. And although there is no room for independent women in the upper layers of New York society, she somehow manages to squeeze her way in, settling in the hubbub of Manhattan. Still, she cannot escape her alterity. In the eyes of the men who desire her, she is bluntly objectified and rarely, if ever, manages to cross the set boundaries. However, this is where Capote adds unnecessary details to the story; in what we suppose was his intention to make Holly appear more human and therefore more believable (we have already mentioned that

Capote's characters were a little too far-out), he introduces instances of depicting the "true" Others with the aim of making Holly seem less "inappropriate". In his version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, these "true" Others resemble the barbarians from Constantine Cavafy's famous poem<sup>5</sup> and they appear to have been introduced for the sole purpose of making Holly's character gain structure and meaning. Naturally, these "true" Others need to be far removed from New York society, so, true to the Western legacy of exploration and travel, the novel's characters stumble upon them in exotic and faraway places. At the end of the road, failure is equated with "going native" in the deepest heart of Africa, which is what Holly is feared to have done. All these issues make *Breakfast at Tiffany's* almost more troubling than *In Cold Blood*, and they are what we are addressing in this (post)colonial reading of Truman Capote's novella, with special emphasis on otherness, mimicry, and colonial desire.

The first thing that a careful reader of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* will notice is the predominant patriarchal and imperialistic mood of the novel; both the young author telling the story, his acquaintances and friends and his neighbour Holly whom he is fascinated with seem to be nothing but side players in a world that belongs to someone else. And although some authors, who have tackled the novel within the frame of gender or queer studies, perceive Holly as a static character who could not have been the main protagonist of the story and who was necessary for her main male counterpart to develop (Cheever 2010: 53–54) or view the main male protagonist and some of the men he spends time with as homosexuals living on the margins (Pugh 2002), one fact remains clear – in the existing structures, most of the main characters taking part in the story (the narrator, the local bar owner Joe Bell and Holly) are presented as outsiders. As we have already mentioned, Truman Capote loved to write about outsiders, having been one himself, but in order to give these particular outsiders a more realistic hue he introduces into the story elements which are completely unnecessary, but which give the readers a taste of the "true" Others so that Holly and her bunch seem different but "civilized".

Having originated from existentialism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, the term O/other is closely connected to several strings of thought. Firstly, there is the perception of the bidirectional (or "reversible", as Fredric Jameson (1934-) called it (Jameson 2009: 103–104)) gaze provided by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), a pioneer in the theory of otherness; his theory, presented in his capital work titled *Being and Nothingness (L'être et le néant)*, involves the idea of the observing subject simultaneously being the object and the observed object being the subject. Due to the plurality of consciousness, both the self and the other are necessary for a person to grasp all the structures of one's being, and the existence of both is crucial for the

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<sup>5</sup>"Waiting for the Barbarians", 1904.

correlation between them (Sartre 1993). Then, there is Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), who perhaps made the term Other with a capital O famous, having taken over the basics from the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). As part of his research into otherness in the context of (self)identification, Lacan's essay titled "The Mirror Stage" («Le stade du miroir») first showed us how a child identified oneself through its mirror image first, not yet having become the object in the dialectics of identifying with the other (Lacan 2001). Lacan's Other with a capital O serves the subject observing it to identify themselves, which adds a new dimension to Sartre's theory (Lacan 1986: 92) and further proves the necessity of the existence of the O/other for the existence of the self.

Within the postcolonial framework, Lacan's theory of the gaze is transferred into postcolonial theory and the terms imperial gaze or postcolonial gaze are coined. It is thought that E. Ann Kaplan (1936-) introduced the term "imperial gaze" in her book titled *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*. In this book, Kaplan discusses the deep connection between the male gaze and the imperial gaze in western patriarchal cultures (Kaplan 1997: xi). A definition of the postcolonial gaze was made possible by Edward W. Said (1935-2003) and his pivotal work *Orientalism* which forever changed the way we perceive the East by presenting a widely accepted but purely fabricated creation (the "Orient") in a new light (Said 1979). In the contemporary context and the age of postcolonialism (now even postpostcolonialism), all these theories and views are more widely used in terms of dislocation and pre-existing hegemonies than in terms of colonization *per se*, while the context in which Capote's novel is set allows us to use them in a more basic sense, as the novel takes place during World War II.

#### 4. Choosing Otherness over the Other

*Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a story told by man. And even though it may very well be a gay or bisexual man, he is still a man and the one responsible for recording the history of Holly Golightly. The narrator feels a little out of place, but he seems to find comfort in the fact that his neighbour is even more out of place than he is. We do not learn his history, we do not know where he has come from and we are vaguely told where he is going. He would like to become a writer, although he appears to be lacking in the necessary talent. Nevertheless, he seems to be settled in his new home and does not plan to leave. What we do know is that Holly, on the other hand, has come from afar and emphasizes the fact that she has no home (as it conveniently says on her calling card, she is "travelling"). She is a child bride from rural Texas who has travelled from the Margin to the Center planning to disrupt the existing hegemonies (as, at this point, she is travelling within the United States, we are using the center as "not geographical

fixity, but the fixity of power” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 36)). In order to perform this somewhat extraordinary feat, Holly needs to take on a pre-conceived role of a successful individual and conquer what is traditionally considered to be men’s space. In the pervading patriarchy and imperialism of the time, when women were still viewed as colonized subjects, Holly will come to represent the Other. Throughout the novel, she serves as a territory the men are trying to conquer. The story contains multiple examples of what has been termed “colonial desire” (Young 1995) – powerful and prominent male figures (for example Rutherford “Rusty” Trawler or José Ybarra-Jaegar) wish to possess Holly in their binary structure of domination, but none of them wish to marry her, as she does not conform to the standards and is “different” in their eyes. In this sense, she almost resembles the object of the dreaded miscegenation. It is also worthy of mentioning that, although Capote set the story in a time of war, the war as such does not play a big part in the story and Holly, being somewhat of a static character, does not fit into either the generally accepted image of what a woman should be like which had been advertised before World War II or the standard set in the decades following the war. Abigail Cheever notes how Holly’s stasis stems from ingesting images women were bombarded with in the 1950s, as described in Betty Friedan’s major work that censures such practices, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963 (2010: 50–51).

As a counter strategy, Holly attempts to mimic her oppressors. Since she cannot become a man, she is forced to become a different kind of woman, and she takes on the role of what she perceives to be a winning combination worthy of Manhattan society. Upon arriving in New York City, Holly stops using her real name, Lulamae, in her first attempt to blend in. She invents her own version of reality and remains high in her ivory tower even though she knows that she does not belong. She does not allow her bouts of grief and anxiety to get the better of her; she appropriates the hegemonic culture, subverts and adapts the dominant language in order to find her grounding, and for a few fleeting moments she succeeds. In her mind, she has invented the kind of person she thinks she is supposed to be and she successfully plays the part; in this sense, she is a “real phony” (Capote 1971: 87) and at first sight very appealing to the reader. One would be inclined to side with Holly in her attempts to climb to the highest layers of society which are out of reach were it not for Capote’s introduction of the different kind of Otherness that pushes Holly to the foreground. Just as Holly serves to confirm the identity of the men who desire her, on this road of hers Capote will use what resembles Cavafy’s barbarians as the counterpart for Holly’s own identity. She will appear to conquer what is considered men’s space and disrupt the existing hegemonies at the expense of the “true” Others. It is only with the fabrication of the existence of the “true” Others that her friends in the story can present her in a positive light. It appears

that Capote tried to use this technique with the reader, too. When compared to the primitivism he bestows upon African people, Holly's life of borderline prostitution and associating with the mafia can even appear quirky. Her kind of Otherness is light and entertaining, while the "true" Others are dark and dangerous or, in the case of Holly's Japanese neighbour, Mr. Yunioshi, irrelevant and dim-witted. The counterposition of these narratives can be found at the very beginning of the novel, when the narrator and the local bar owner, Joe Bell, discuss Holly's disappearance (in the original story, Holly plays a significant but brief role in the life of the narrator, and then disappears). Bell has called the narrator to his bar on Lexington Avenue to inform him that he has had some news. When the narrator asks whether Bell has heard from Holly, Bell informs him that this is not exactly the case, but opens up this dialogue by positioning Mr. Yunioshi in the aforementioned manner: "You recall a certain Mr I.Y. Yunioshi? A gentleman from Japan." The narrator tries to correct him: "'From California,' I said, recalling Mr Yunioshi perfectly." to which Joe Bell replies: "'Don't go mixing me up. All I'm asking, you know who I mean?'" (Capote 1971: 11). So, this completely irrelevant person called Mr. Yunioshi provides valuable information regarding Holly, because he has been to Africa. The narrator is aware of this fact, because he had read about it, but the bar owner provides further details. He extracts a manila folder from the cash register and shows the narrator three photographs. This is the first instance in which Holly is directly juxtaposed to the "true" Others:

In the envelope were three photographs, more or less the same, though taken from different angles: a tall delicate Negro man wearing a calico skirt and with a shy, yet vain smile, displaying in his hands an odd wood sculpture, an elongated carving of a head, a girl's, her hair sleek and short as a young man's, her smooth wood eyes too large and tilted in the tapering face, her mouth wide, overdrawn, not unlike clown-lips. On a glance it resembled most primitive carving; and then it didn't, for here was the spit-image of Holly Golightly, at least as much of a likeness as a dark still thing could be. (Capote 1971: 12)

If we take a close look at this excerpt, we will notice the implication that the carving is not primitive only because it is a carving of Holly. In addition, we will notice that the image of Holly is displayed over what Capote is trying to pass off as a "primitive" look, which could apply to anyone non-white: the eyes are "too large" and also "tilted" and her mouth is "wide" and resembles "clown lips". Additionally, the carving is a "dark still thing". And although one could argue that a dark wooden statue is certainly dark and still, that there is nothing more to it, Capote adds more to this

highly unnecessary depiction surrounding Holly's disappearance. The narrator takes a look at the photo and at first sight agrees that this could be Holly, but Bell is adamant that it is her and that "The little Jap knew it was her the minute he saw her." (Capote 1971: 12). We could ponder here whether it is worse that Bell calls Mr. Yunioshi "little" (a term Holly uses, too, calling him a "dear little man" (Capote 1971: 16)) or a "Jap", the common unfriendly term used for the Japanese people during World War II, but the dialogue takes an even worse turn when Bell tells the narrator:

Here's what the Jap says, and the story was this: On Christmas Day Mr Yunioshi had passed with his camera through Tococul, a village in the tangles of nowhere and of no interest, merely a congregation of mud huts with monkeys in the yards and buzzards on the roofs. He'd decided to move on when he saw suddenly a Negro squatting in a doorway carving monkeys on a walking stick. Mr Yunioshi was impressed and asked to see more of his work. Whereupon he was shown the carving of the girl's head: and felt, so he told Joe Bell, as if he were falling in a dream. But when he offered to buy it the Negro cupped his private parts in his hand (apparently a tender gesture, comparable to tapping one's heart) and said no. A pound of salt and ten dollars, a wristwatch and two pounds of salt and twenty dollars, nothing swayed him. Mr Yunioshi was in all events determined to learn how the carving came to be made. It cost him his salt and his watch, and the incident was conveyed in African and pig-English and finger-talk. (Capote 1971: 12-13)

The presented excerpt continues the biased and completely unnecessary depiction of the remote village. Capote's depiction of Africa as a dark and primitive place would fall under Edward Said's theory of Orientalism which, in this case, is not used to denote the East but Africa, and is reminiscent of the manner in which Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) depicted "the locals" in his widely criticized novel *Heart of Darkness*. The village is located, as Capote shamefully puts it, "in the tangles of nowhere and of no interest". So, if "nowhere" and "of no interest" were not enough, Capote found it important to stress that it was in the "tangles" of these two that the village is situated and added monkeys and buzzards to the picture to add a finishing touch. Mr. Yunioshi, who even in his inconsequentiality sees that this village is not interesting, stops in his tracks like a child when he sees the woodcarver (at this point not because he knows he has a carving of Holly but apparently because he sees someone squatting in a doorway making something). At one point in the excerpt Capote produces a sentence about the African man's gesture that was perhaps meant to be humorous, but it loses all humour

in the next few lines when Capote likens the conversation between the two to a trade-off, not unlike the one that had taken part numerous times in the colonial era and is also reminiscent of the interactions between the American settlers and the Native Americans. A further reminder of such a setting is the story's end that recounts the arrival of white horseback riders:

But it would seem that in the spring of that year a party of three white persons had appeared out of the brush riding horseback. A young woman and two men. The men, both red-eyed with fever, were forced for several weeks to stay shut and shivering in an isolated hut, while the young woman, having presently taken a fancy to the woodcarver, shared the woodcarver's mat. "I don't credit that part," Joe Bell said squeamishly. "I know she had her ways, but I don't think she'd be up to anything as much as that." (Capote 1971: 13)

In this part of the story we would have a clear image of white European explorers or the pioneers of the American West, but there is one exception, a woman is riding with the men. The implication could be obvious – she is intrepid and obviously more resilient than the men. However, in order to accentuate this image further, Capote adds a wholly unnecessary part about her sharing a bed with the African woodcarver. In the conversation, this is singled out as her one possible fault; Joe Bell is "squeamish" at the thought. He is afraid that Holly might have "gone native" which, in his eyes, would imply her certain and irreversible downfall. In other words, we might infer that it would be alright for a single woman to be travelling alone with not one, but two men, as long as they were white. This is further proven by the end of the conversation in which Joe Bells obviously gives no second thought to what Holly did with the two white men (as opposed to the narrator, who is more smitten with her):

"And then?"

"Then nothing," he shrugged. "By and by she went like she come, rode away on a horse."

"Alone, or with the two men?"

Joe Bell blinked. "With the two men, I guess." (Capote 1971: 13)

When we first read Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* we were shocked to find such depictions in what we expected to be a cosmopolitan tale of emancipation. Upon serious reflection, we concluded that a possible explanation for their existence might be what we are proposing – that Capote, famous for his love of outcasts, wanted to make Holly's

Otherness more appealing by contrasting her with what he saw as people who were “really different” at the time. To our mind, he fell into the entrapment of stereotyping and a dangerous discourse of power relations, and not those between the sexes. We also found the fact that this aspect of the novel was completely ignored in the movie fascinating, though not unexpected. Due to the nature of the cultural relations between the USA and East Asia in that period of history, the movie accentuates the role of Mr. Yunioshi, played by Micky Rooney, who takes on the role of the “Oriental” neighbour who will not stop pestering Holly and who, in modern terms, uses “yellowface” to do so. In his unfair treatment of characters who are of different ethnic backgrounds, Capote was unkind to all non-whites, but people of African origin seem to be the ones worst affected in the novel.

In pursuing this dangerous path, Capote's version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* also abounds in echoes of what we would call Euro-centric notions of exploration and travel in postcolonial theory. These motives can be found throughout the course of the story, firstly in the sense of Holly leaving her hometown, then her husband Doc leaving their small rural community in order to find her, and finally all the way to the travels made by Holly and her acquaintances to different countries and different continents, such as South America and Africa. In each of these three instances the protagonists are leaving familiar ground, and in each of these instances they are trying to conquer something they believe belongs to them – Holly is exploring toward a new life, Doc wants his old life back, while the New York socialites want more of the feeling that the world is their oyster. These last examples are very important in the picture that Capote paints – his selection of destinations where his protagonists seek adventure reflects territories that had been both explored and conquered throughout the centuries, South America and Africa (in the novel itself we get proof that these are territories that had been colonized, South America boasts people of different ethnic backgrounds, while the part of Africa which Holly visits is called East Anglia). This is another instance where what we would call Capote's graded othering is present – Holly visits South America for fun, but the place where she disappears is Africa. Holly, as the central character in these travels, is ambiguous in her attitude towards the “Others”. On the one hand, as we have mentioned, Capote promoted her as somewhat of an emancipated heroine and conceived of her as being ahead of her time. However, once again he was kinder to the version of Otherness similar to his own: Holly promotes the idea of homosexuality and bisexuality, and declares herself a bit of a lesbian. However, prior to this declaration she still does inappropriately refer to lesbians as “bull-dykes” (Capote 1971: 25). With regards to the matter of skin colour, Holly's stance is again unclear; on the one hand, Capote makes her a broadminded liberal, she approves of the fact that José Ybarra-Jaegar, whose child she is carrying out of wedlock, has a

bit of “*le nègre*” in him, but then she calls her unborn child “a quite coony baby with bright green beautiful eyes” while declaring that nothing could be prettier (Capote 1971: 75–76). A combination of these two problematic lines of thought can be found in Holly’s insult to Madame Spanella, whom she calls a “dreary, drivelling old bull-dyke” with “cotton-pickin’ hands” (Capote 1971: 85). Ambiguous statements such as these, which can appear quite shocking, muffle the not-so-glamorous facts about Holly, such as the “tips” she takes for the powder room and cab fare home (Capote 1971: 28) or men’s panting and puffing she complains about (Capote 1971: 48). The same applies to her statement of looking for a list of the fifty richest men in Brazil, “regardless of race or colour” (Capote 1971: 94). All the aforementioned examples could be Holly’s way of broaching unfamiliar territory, but Capote still places her above those he views as less forward-oriented than herself. While on a trip to Havana (once again, alone with a man who is not her husband and who is emotionally involved with another woman, while she too is involved with another man) Holly experiences the following situation:

We had an irresistible guide, most of him Negro and the rest of him Chinese, and while I don’t go much for one or the other, the combination was fairly riveting: so I let him play kneesie under the table, because frankly I didn’t find him at all banal; but then one night he took us to a blue movie, and what do you suppose? There *he* was *on* the screen. (Capote 1971: 58)

The assumption that the guide should have been considered “banal” is quite troubling in Holly’s recounting of events. It is also troubling that Capote instantly made him a seemingly promiscuous character; again, to draw the negative attention off of Holly who plays “kneesie under the table” with someone she has just met. We would conclude that in his love of her character Capote went too far and that his attempts at making her Otherness seem more appealing and more acceptable have been unfairly made at the expense of other, more natural and quite certainly more acceptable, ways of being different.

## 5. The legacy

In this paper we have attempted to present a different, less known, troubling side to Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. In our proposed (post)colonial reading of this novel, we have shown elements of what in postcolonial theory would be defined as otherness, mimicry, and colonial desire. All these components, though somewhat unexpected, would have been quite acceptable, since Capote wanted to write about a young woman who would have been a social outcast at the time. In his own words:

“The main reason I wrote about Holly, outside of the fact that I liked her so much, was that she was such a symbol of all these girls who come to New York and spin in the sun for a moment like May flies and then disappear. I wanted to rescue one girl from that anonymity and preserve her for posterity” (Norden 1968). He did accomplish this goal, but not in the way he had hoped. While we would agree that in instances such as when Holly is fleeing the country “... Capote uses this moment to suggest that America denies a lasting place for people who reject or resist this ideology – particularly single women (who are single for too long) and homosexuals” (Fahy 2014: 98–99), that Holly “remained a victim of a socioeconomic hierarchy and domestic ideology that disempowered women by insisting on marriage and motherhood” (Fahy 2014: 102) and that the need for Lulamae to become Holly “... reveals a rigid class hierarchy in America that limits personal and social freedom to those who do not conform” (Fahy 2014: 107), we still hold that the examples of othering that do not directly involve Holly, such as those presented in this paper, are unwarranted, inexcusable and completely unnecessary. We believe that perhaps these instances are a product of Capote’s unconscious world view, which, contrary to all his outward broadmindedness and flamboyancy, seems to have still been a privileged white male perspective on the inside.

To conclude, we would quote Fahy as saying that “... our investment in Hepburn’s Holly, as well as the comforting messages of the film, has skewed our understanding of Capote’s work and the era in which it was written – the 1950s. It has, in effect, robbed the book of its historical and social significance” (2014: 96). We would agree, even further than Fahy may have intended to point out. Capote’s version of *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* reminds us of the constant need to reexamine important works of literature within newly formed discourses and always in a new light. Even though Capote tried to tackle the world surrounding him from a different perspective, and tried to show that it was not the “homogenous monolith (that is middleclass, male, heterosexual, white, western)” (Hutcheon 1988: 12) some people would have assumed it to be, he still fell short in presenting the ex-centric community in a fair and equal light. In postcolonial theory, the term O/other can also be taken to refer to “the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 170), and this is exactly what Truman Capote inadvertently did; in his attempt to make Holly appear more acceptable and appealing, he marginalized entire communities.

With this in mind, we find it a fortunate turn of events that in this case the fame of the movie by far surpassed the fame of the book. Although it is nicely written, it leaves a lot to be desired in its treatment of people on or from the margins. However ideologically charged or non-emancipating the movie may be, its sugary happy ending

trumps the story of “going native”. Though it may be questionable from the point of view of feminism, to our mind promoting a heterosexual relationship and marriage is perhaps a little less dangerous than giving rein to an all-white perspective on the world. In the mentioned “Playboy” interview Capote admitted that he had been “disturbed by this cinematic bowdlerizing” because “The book was really rather bitter, and Holly Golightly was real—a tough character, not an Audrey Hepburn type at all” (Norden 1968). It becomes obvious from such statements that Capote’s intentions were probably genuine and he was probably unaware of the damage he had done. In his words, “The film became a mawkish valentine to New York City and Holly and, as a result, was thin and pretty, whereas it should have been rich and ugly” (Norden 1968). With the last part of the statement we cannot help but agree.

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