

## 21M.284 Essay 3-2

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In this essay, I analyze the way the song “Moon River” by Henri Mancini functions in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961).

The opening of the movie features a non-diegetic instrumental version of the song, as Holly Golightly, on her way home at dawn in an evening dress, has breakfast in front of the jewelry store Tiffany’s. Thus, the audience is immediately familiarized with the “Moon River” melody.

The song appears diegetically roughly mid-way through the movie. Holly Golightly sings it, playing the guitar on the edge of her window. We hear the song from Paul Varjak’s perspective. He is in his apartment upstairs of Holly’s. He’s starting to fall in love with Holly, as revealed by the new story he’s writing about her on his typewriter: “*My friend – There was once a very lovely, very frightened girl. She lived alone except for a nameless cat.*” He first hears a few guitar chords, before Holly starts to sing. He opens the window and looks out at Holly, smiling. The camera then cuts to her. When the camera cuts to her more closely, and she starts singing “two drifters”, the music becomes partly non-diegetic as other instruments join in to accompany Holly. During the song, the camera alternates between cuts of Paul listening and Holly singing, the cuts getting closer to her each successive time. When Holly ends her song, she looks up, finally noticing Paul, and smiles back at him. The non-diegetic instrumental accompaniment continues, while they talk briefly.

In the overall narrative of *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, the “Moon River” song defines a turning point. Paul and Holly start falling in love, but reality keeps them apart. Paul discovers that Holly has a husband, and kids to support. Holly continues to live in her dream world, but reality strikes her when her husband arrives and she realizes she will soon need to support her brother Fred. This is when she starts an aggressive pursuit of rich suitors.

The song re-appears at the end of the movie, when Holly finally accepts to love Paul. This time, it is entirely non-diegetic, sung by a chorus. The song continues through the end credits.

In conclusion, because of its repeated occurrences at key moments (beginning, middle and end) in the movie, the “Moon River” melody really defines *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. It seems to support Holly in her dream world. At the beginning, the music supports her reverie as she looks at Tiffany’s vitrine. In the middle, the partly diegetic song reinforces the connection between Paul and Holly, the “two drifters”. At the end, the non-diegetic song reminds us of Holly’s development in accepting her love for Paul.