

Other Voices, Other Rooms Study Guide

Other Voices, Other Rooms by Truman Capote

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Plot Summary

Other Voices, Other Rooms is the story of Joel Knox, a young boy who finds out about the different forms that love can take. Joel has been raised by his aunt Ellen in New Orleans after the death of Joel's mother. But Joel's life changes when he receives a mysterious letter inviting him to come live with his long-forgotten father at a place called Skully's Landing. What Joel finds at the deteriorating mansion at the Landing both surprises and repulses him, yet Joel remains and finds his place among the eccentric characters who become his new family.

Joel comes to Skully's Landing after receiving a letter written with purposeful intention not by his father, Edward, but by Randolph, the cousin of Joel's father's new wife, Amy. Randolph had enlisted Amy's nursing help after Randolph accidentally shoots Edward, paralyzing him for life. Amy marries Edward and the new couple, along with Randolph, move back to Amy's family's home, Skully's Landing, in remote Louisiana.

Joel's arrival at the Landing opens up a world of eccentric characters and behaviors as Joel attempts to adapt to his new surroundings. Most puzzling to Joel is the reluctance of Amy and Randolph to introduce Joel to his father. This obscurity conjures up fantastic dreams in Joel who has a very active imagination and dream life complete with characters with their own special skills and abilities. When Joel does meet his father he is devastated to learn that his father is an invalid, incapable of communicating or bonding with Joel, so Joel is forced to look for love among the other people in his narrow world.

Joel finds a surrogate mother figure in the black cook at the Landing named Missouri, whose attempts to care for Joel most closely mimic those of his mother and Aunt Ellen. Joel learns that Amy had only wanted Joel to live at the Landing so that Joel could provide some respite for her in the unending care of Edward. Joel's refusal to care for Edward in the way Amy would like, in addition to Joel's budding relationship with Randolph, almost completely severs any hope of a relationship between Amy and Joel.

Joel finds friends in the Thompkins twins, Idabel and Florabel, but Joel finds himself more interested in the tomboy, Idabel, who spurns even the small romantic gestures offered by Joel. As the story progresses, both Idabel and Joel struggle with their emerging sexual identities and preferences and ultimately discover they are attracted to others of the same sex.

By the end of the story, Randolph has managed to create a world in which Joel is completely dependent upon him and uses this bond to manipulate Joel to enter into a budding romantic relationship. Joel feels a new sense of maturity now though, and feels empowered by his experiences and the unusual love he has found in the eccentric household at Skully's Landing.

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Other Voices, Other Rooms is the story of Joel Knox, a young boy who finds out about the different forms that love can take. Joel has been raised by his aunt Ellen in New Orleans after the death of Joel's mother. But Joel's life changes when he receives a mysterious letter inviting him to come live with his long-forgotten father at a place called Skully's Landing. What Joel finds at the deteriorating mansion at the Landing both surprises and repulses him, yet Joel remains and finds his place among the eccentric characters who become his new family.

As the story begins, a truck driver for the Turpentine Company named Sam Radclif drinks a beer at the Morning Star Café in Paradise Chapel, Louisiana. Sam is approached by the café's proprietor, Sydney Katz, asking if Sam will transport a stranded thirteen-year-old boy who needs a ride to Noon City. Sam thinks the boy looks too effeminate to be a real boy, but takes pity on the boy's dejected demeanor and agrees to give the boy a ride. The boy introduces himself as Joel Harrison Knox and explains that he has come from New Orleans on the bus and no one has arrived to meet him.

Joel tells the men that he is going to live with his father, but neither man knows of anyone named Knox in the area. Joel produces a letter written by his father, Edward Sansom, to Joel's Aunt Ellen, requesting that Joel be sent to live with him in a place called Skully's Landing. Joel explains that his mother did not allow Joel to use the Sansom surname after she and Joel's father divorced. Joel has never seen his father and has never been to Skully's Landing, but Sam agrees to take Joel as far as Noon City, where Joel can find his way to the Landing.

As Joel rides with Sam, his memories drift back to the day he and his mother walked home from the market in a freezing rain. Joel's mother gets sick and dies soon after and Joel is sent to Pontchartrain to live with his mother's sister, Ellen, and her family of five small children. Aunt Ellen is good to Joel but Joel never completely fits in and torments the young children to show his dissatisfaction for his plight. Joel resists Aunt Ellen's efforts to include Joel in the family activities and also skips school regularly as rebellion to all authority.

When the letter from Joel's father arrives with the invitation to Skully's Landing, Joel is thrilled for the opportunity to leave Aunt Ellen and her brood. Joel has always dreamed of some great good fortune befalling him but never dreamed it would come in the shape of his long-forgotten father. Joel's trip to meet his father is not as grand as Joel had hoped, with minor misfortunes along the way capped off by the fact that no one from the Landing had shown up to retrieve Joel from the Morning Star Café upon his arrival in Paradise Chapel.



Sam tells Joel that Joel's father, Mr. Sansom, is the man who married local girl Amy Skully, but Sam has never met Mr. Sansom personally. Sam also tells Joel that in addition to Mr. Sansom and Amy, the Landing is the home of an eccentric cousin and some niggers. Eventually Sam delivers Joel to Noon City with apologies that he cannot take him all the way to the Landing but he's driving the company truck and does not want to create any problems for himself by driving the vehicle for a personal trip. Joel is resigned to finding a ride the rest of the way to the Landing and sets off to explore the town.

Joel's first encounter with a Noon City resident is the town barber who offers Joel a nickel if Joel will apprehend a nasty red-haired girl who repeatedly throws rocks at the barber shop. Joel declines the offer but get his first good look at the red-haired menace, Idabel Thompkins. Joel learns from the barber that Idabel is the town's tomboy and major nuisance to adults and children alike. Joel proceeds to an establishment called R.V. Lacey's Princely Place, where he meets Roberta V. Lacey, the proprietress.

Roberta is a large woman with lots of dark hair covering her body. Joel is slightly afraid of her but warms up when Roberta takes pity on Joel and offers him a NEHI grape soda. While enjoying his drink, Joel catches sight of Idabel demanding to know who Joel is and asking for a treat on credit. Roberta shoos Idabel from the store for being a tomboy with no manners and then helps Joel arrange a ride out to Skully's Landing with an old man named Jesus Fever, who lives at the Landing and happens to be in town today.

It is dusk before Joel meets Jesus Fever, a very old Negro pygmy man with yellow eyes, dressed in a derby hat. Jesus Fever tells Joel that Amy has sent Jesus Fever into town to find Joel. The pair sets off for Skully's Landing in Jesus Fever's wagon led by the mule, John Brown. On the ride home, Joel notices two girls running along in the brush along the road and identifies one as Idabel Thompkins. The girls eventually catch up to the wagon and the other girl, Florabel, Idabel's sister, jumps on board for a ride.

Florabel is quick to find out Joel's story and tells Joel that she and Idabel are twins but that is where the similarity ends. Florabel considers herself to be quite a lady just as Idabel is the epitome of a tomboy. Idabel has even dared to look into the windows of the mansion at Skully's Landing to see the eccentric cousin Randolph that everyone always talks about. Before parting company, Florabel tells Joel that the Thompkins house is close to the Landing and invites Joel to come visit any time.

Jesus Fever, who has been asleep during most of the trip and has let John Brown pull the wagon of his own accord, wakes up suddenly as the wagon approaches the mansion at the Landing. Joel, however, is now asleep and does not notice a woman holding a lantern descending the steps to greet him.



Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter is the longest in the book and Capote takes his time to establish the geography and the nature of the people in the area. A native of Louisiana, Capote intimately knows both topics and it is clear in his descriptions of each. For example, when describing the area surrounding Noon City, Capote writes, "this is lonesome country; and here in the swamplike hollows where tiger lilies bloom the size of a man's head, there are luminous green logs that shine under the dark marsh water like drowned corpses; often the only movement on the landscape is winter smoke winding out the chimney of some sorry-looking farmhouse, or a wing-stiffened bird, silent and arrow-eyed, circling over the black deserted pinewoods" (chap. 1, p. 3). This description entices the reader by painting a vivid portrait of the bleak surroundings into which Joel is headed.

Capote is a master at dialect and dialogue as evidenced in the ramblings of the barber's wife to no one in particular: "I declare but what he ain't no better'n that Idabel; ain't neither one got the sense God gave 'em. Oh shoot, I says to Miz Potter (she was in for a shampoo a week ago today and I'd give a pretty penny to know how she gets that mop so filthy dirt), well I says: 'Miz Potter, you teach that Idabel at the school,' I says, 'now how come she's so confounded mean?" (chap. 1, p. 21). This passage perfectly captures the dialect and style of a rural Southern woman well known for gossip and both entertains and informs the reader at the same time.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

The next morning Joel awakens in a big four-poster bed and senses that someone else is in the room with him. Joel hears the sound of bird wings and a woman's dress moving about, and peers from under the covers to see a woman chasing a blue jay trapped in the room. Watching the woman shaking a fireplace poker toward the frantic bird, Joel assumes that the woman must be Miss Amy, his father's wife.

Joel barely recalls Miss Amy's leading him to his bedroom the night before through a maze of hallways and rooms of the big house. Joel now notices that Miss Amy is a slight, dowdy woman dressed in a pale grey dress and with one hand gloved in the same pale grey. Eventually Miss Amy traps the bird and tiptoes out of Joel's room.

Joel's suitcase is nowhere to be seen, so Joel dresses in the clothes he had worn yesterday and takes note of his surroundings. Joel's new bedroom is large yet musty, and filled with old furniture covered in dust. Joel spots a blue jay feather floating in the air and puts it in a small box in which he also places a bullet he had taken from Sam Radclif's truck. When a knock comes at the door, Joel is sure it must be his father come to greet him, but Joel is met by Miss Amy telling Joel that it is past noon and that Joel had missed a merry arrival planned by Randolph in Joel's honor the night before.

Miss Amy explains that Randolph is her cousin who has greatly anticipated Joel's arrival but could not wait up for Joel last night due to a bad asthma attack. Miss Amy explains that the house has no internal plumbing or electricity because Randolph does not approve of such things. Miss Amy tells Joel that Randolph had been born in the room that Joel will now occupy and that Randolph's mother, Angela Lee, had also died in the room a few years ago.

Miss Amy leads Joel downstairs to get some lunch but ignores Joel's questions about his father. Joel seats himself in the kitchen and has the eerie feeling that his father may have seen him already and may even be watching him at this very moment. Soon Joel meets Missouri Fever, Jesus's granddaughter, who cooks for the Scully household. Missouri, also known as Zoo, is weary of the lonesome life at the Landing and plans to leave for Washington DC after Jesus Fever dies. Zoo has chosen Washington DC because she is tired of living with so much sun and would like to live where it snows sometimes.

Joel learns that Zoo had been married at the age of fourteen to a man named Keg, who slit her throat in a rage one night shortly after their marriage. Zoo wears a scarf to hide the scar that rings her neck and is always scared that Keg will break free from his punishment on a chain gang and return to kill her.



Joel wonders about his father and Zoo tells Joel that only Miss Amy tends to Mr. Sansom. Zoo tells Joel to attend a religious service she holds on Sunday afternoons for Jesus Fever and herself, and Joel is left to his own devices until then. Exploring the outside of the house, Joel wanders in and out of overgrown foliage and looks up to see a woman with white hair staring back at him from one of the bedroom windows.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Birds play a symbolic role in this novel, beginning with Joel's being awakened on his first morning at Skully's Landing when Miss Amy traps a blue jay in Joel's bedroom. The bird's entrapment foreshadows Joel's ultimate need to escape the suffocating environment of the Landing as well as the flawed people who inhabit it. There is also foreshadowing when Zoo tells Joel that Randolph likes dead birds with pretty feathers. In this instance, the dead birds symbolize Joel's ultimate capture by Randolph, who enjoys the company of pretty boys. Throughout the novel, Joel takes special note of birds, which seem to act out on the feelings Joel is experiencing at the time.

There is also foreshadowing in Joel's thoughts about his father's eyes watching him from a secret place in the kitchen. Later in the book Joel develops a fixation about his father's staring eyes and imagines that his father can see everything Joel does no matter where Joel is.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Later that afternoon, Joel joins Zoo and Jesus Fever and watches apprehensively as Zoo stomps the ground and plays the accordion all the while shouting out praise and prayers to the Lord. Jesus Fever joins in on the singing and exhortations and Joel cowers in awe of the spectacle created by the man and his granddaughter. Before long, a thunderstorm approaches and Jesus Fever feels a deep chill, yet Zoo will not end her prayer service.

Joel reverts inward and wonders who has such a grudge against him that his life, which up until now has been a series of huge disappointments, has deteriorated to the point where he is trapped with two crazy people in the middle of a thunderstorm in the swamp. Just as Joel plunges into his own personal misery, he catches sight of the jagged scar ringing Zoo's neck as she throws off the ribbon that had encircled it. In that moment Joel realizes that the world must have a grudge against Zoo too and he determines to become her friend. The prayer service ends under cover of the porch with Joel asking God not for things he normally would have coveted but to be loved.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Capote is well known for his use of descriptive language. In this chapter he writes that Zoo's gold tooth flashing in her mouth reminds Joel of a neon sign. "The off-on flash of Zoo's gold tooth made Joel's heart suddenly like a rock rattling in his chest, for it suggested to him a certain winking neon sign: R.R. Oliver's Funeral Esth. Darkness. R.R. Oliver's Funeral Esth. Darkness" (chap. 3, p. 71). By repeating the sign name and inserting the word "darkness", Capote sets up a visual image of the neon sign by mimicking the rhythm of the blinking neon.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

At dinner that night Joel meets Randolph for the first time and Joel's attempts to identify the strange woman are met by evasive answers by both Randolph and Miss Amy. Randolph, drinking sherry and smoking cigarettes, tries to tell Joel that he has hallucinated or been filled with too many of Zoo's stories. Randolph diverts the conversation by telling Joel about the Zoo's ill-fated marriage to Keg and Zoo's resulting wounds from Keg's attack on her.

Randolph and Aunt Amy's circuitous conversation forces Joel to enter his own imaginary place in his head where he escapes to avoid uncomfortable circumstances. Joel is brought out of his reverie when Aunt Amy requests permission to play the pianola. While the music plays, Randolph moves closer to Joel on the sofa and holds Joel's hand in his. Joel is even more uncomfortable when Randolph whispers that he hopes Joel will like him. The tension in the room is broken by the sound of a noise in a room upstairs followed by the sight of a red tennis ball rolling into the parlor. Joel pretends to not see the ball because neither Randolph nor Aunt Amy seems capable of providing direct answers.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter Capote introduces the reader to Joel's imaginary life and friends upon whom Joel reverts when faced with uncomfortable situations in real life. During the uncomfortable evening spent with Randolph and Aunt Amy in the parlor, Joel turns inside to find Mr. Mystery, Annie Rose Kuppermann, and a man who never wears the same costume twice, Mr. Edward Q. Sansom. Joel calls the place where his mystery people live "the other room", giving some definition to the book's title and meaning—other voices, other rooms.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

One morning Joel writes a letter to Aunt Ellen, telling her that he does not like living at the Landing because it is boring and the people are weird. Joel asks for Aunt Ellen's help, even offering up the idea of his attending a military school as a possible solution. When mailing the letter, Joel runs into Zoo and a black man named Little Sunshine, an odd acquaintance of Randolph's. Little Sunshine is known for being an eccentric hermit and has come to deliver a strange necklace to Zoo which is supposed to have magical powers.

Joel proceeds to the Thompkins house and soon hears Little Sunshine calling his name. The two strike up a conversation with Little Sunshine, agreeing to make a charm for Joel to prevent anything bad from happening. The only caveat is that Joel must come to Little Sunshine's home to retrieve the charm and the way is through a swamp and over the Drowning Pond.

Little Sunshine explains that the Drowning Pond is near the now dilapidated Cloud Hotel, which had been a place of elegant parties and refined guests at one time. The hotel declined after tales of two people drowning in the nearby pond and returning to haunt anyone who came near. The woman who had owned the hotel, a distant relative of the Skullys, killed herself in a hotel in St. Louis from despair over the whole situation. Little Sunshine remains at the decaying Cloud Hotel though because it has always been his home.

Joel proceeds on to the Thompkins house, where he encounters Florabel preening on the front porch. Idabel is on her way to the creek to retrieve a watermelon she had stashed there to chill. Florabel once again bemoans Idabel's tomboy ways, yet Joel can find nothing wrong with Idabel's actions and habits, a fact that appalls Florabel. In return, Florabel confides that Idabel has a crush on Joel.

When Idabel returns with the watermelon, the two sisters engage in a brawl when Florabel brings up the fact that their father wants to have Idabel's dog, Henry, put down because it is thought that Henry has a fatal disease which could be contagious. Joel tries to intervene, but Idabel's wrath is too strong for him. Eventually Florabel climbs to the highest point in a nearby tree followed closely by the still furious Idabel, and it is at this point that Joel makes his exit back home.

Joel approaches the Landing with dread until the sight of the mailbox and his letter to Aunt Ellen lifts his spirit. Joel peeks into the mailbox just to confirm his hopes, and instead of his letter to Aunt Ellen, he finds several letters addressed to a man named Pepe Alvarez in care of the postmaster in exotic cities such as Barcelona, Spain, Copenhagen, Denmark, and Fukuoka, Japan. Joel's letter is missing, but Joel finds the



six cents he had left for the postman lying in the dust. Joel's thoughts are interrupted by the sound of two gunshots, although Joel sees no one anywhere in the vicinity.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The significance of the book's title is further explained in this chapter when Little Sunshine explains his long-term residence at the decaying White Cloud Hotel: "It was a terrible, strange-looking hotel. But Little Sunshine stayed on: it was his rightful home, he said, for if he went away, as he had once upon a time, other voices, other rooms, voices lost and clouded, strummed his dreams" (chap. 5, p. 100) The memories Little Sunshine has of the grand life during the splendor of the hotel's peak years still haunt him, and leaving the place would be a betrayal to all those who had ever visited.



Part 2, Chapter 6

Part 2, Chapter 6 Summary

Later that day Zoo gives Joel a haircut, using garden shears and a bowl on his head for a guideline. Zoo reveals that it had been she who had shot the guns to scare away hawks which have been stealing chickens from the Landing's coops. Joel hates his haircut but hugs Zoo, imploring her to love him no matter what. Zoo leaves the house to tend to Jesus Fever and Joel is left alone again with his thoughts and the strange noises in the big house.

Joel's reverie is interrupted by the feel of a red ball hitting him and the sight of the ball rolling down the stairs. Randolph emerges from his room and opens the door of another room, makes some odd hand gestures, and turns to ask Joel to bring a glass of water. When Joel returns to the room with the water, Aunt Amy invites Joel in to join her and Randolph, who guides Joel toward a bed where Mr. Sansom is waiting. Joel realizes at once that Mr. Sansom is an invalid who needs to be fed and cared for completely. As he moves into the room Joel can see a hand with a gold wedding band sticking out from the covers, and Joel moves forward only after that hand drops a red tennis ball in Joel's direction.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Analysis

At last Joel meets his father, Mr. Sansom, but the meeting is not quite what Joel had imagined it would be. Finally Joel sees his father's eyes, not directly, but reflected in a mirror, and knows that his father is all-seeing, not in the paternal way he had hoped but rather in a physical paralysis which will not allow his father's eyes to close. Joel's father's eyes will symbolically become a source of guilt, fear, and an all-knowing presence as the story progresses.



Part 2, Chapter 7

Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

Idabel spots Joel hiding in the woods near the Landing and asks Joel to go fishing. Joel agrees although he squeamish at the thought of baiting a hook. Randolph wears dress clothes and he has been hiding from Randolph who is intent on painting Joel's portrait. Joel does not want to return to the house to change clothes though, because Miss Amy will corral Joel into sitting for hours with the unresponsive and immobile Mr. Sansom.

On the walk to the creek, Idabel and Joel pass through a woods where Joel inquires about a lone grave with a tombstone reading, "Toby, Killed by the Cat". Idabel explains that Toby had been the infant daughter of Jesus Fever and his wife and had died when a cat supposedly sucked the breath from the baby's mouth. Joel's incredulousness launches him into another one of his dream states, this one about death, and Idabel has to firmly rouse Joel from his reverie.

Idabel offers Joel her colored glasses to wear so that things will be prettier for Joel's view. Idabel won the glasses at a traveling carnival and wears them only occasionally. Idabel and Joel's fishing trip does not produce any catches, but the two share a close conversation about dreams, fears, and hopes. Toward the end of the afternoon, Idabel produces a bar of soap so that she and Joel can bathe in the creek. Joel is skittish about disrobing in front of a girl but soon loses his shyness as Idabel boldly takes off her clothes and jumps into the water.

Afterwards, as they lay on the ground to dry, Joel kisses Isabel tenderly on the cheek and Isabel is instantly offended. The two wrestle on the ground and the colored glasses break under their bodies.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter is symbolic because it marks Joel's coming of age and the reality that he must adjust to the eccentricities of life at Skully's Landing. Joel has a stream of consciousness dream about death after seeing the baby's grave, which makes him even more melancholy and resigned to his fate. The obvious symbolism of Isabel's offer to let Joel use her colored glasses indicates her need to shelter Joel from what may come in this bizarre world for which Joel does not seem prepared. During the afternoon at the creek, Joel shares a sensitive side and a tenderness toward Isabel, which she rejects. The crushing of the colored glasses symbolizes the fact that Joel must face facts about his world and his burgeoning alternate sexual identity.



Part 2, Chapter 8

Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

Joel is in Randolph's room for the first time as Randolph paints Joel's portrait. During the rest breaks when Joel is free to move, he looks around and is amazed at the collection of old furnishings, books, art pieces, and trinkets crammed into the space. Randolph makes no apologies for the clutter and dismisses the state of the room as a grave of his past, including relics from other times and places. Amy knocks at the door asking for Joel to read to Mr. Sansom, but Randolph sends her away so that he and Joel's time together can continue uninterrupted.

For the first time Joel sees a photograph of what his father had looked like in his prime; a handsome, vital man. Also included in the picture are Pepe Alvarez, the boxer Mr. Sansom managed and Randolph's girlfriend at the time, Dolores. Randolph tells Joel about his history with Dolores and Pepe Alvarez.

When Randolph meets Dolores in Madrid he falls in love. Randolph lives in Europe, spending most of his time in art museums. Randolph and Dolores fall in love and move to Paris and then to Cuba, where they live a bohemian lifestyle.

One day Randolph discovers Dolores' dream book containing the contents of her nightly dreams which Randolph finds very violent, and he watches for signs of anger towards him every day. Randolph and Dolores take a trip to the United States, eventually settling in a patio apartment in New Orleans. The couple is very happy and the dream book disappears, although Randolph does not know if the book is intentionally hidden or no longer in existence.

One day Randolph sees Dolores talking intimately to a strange man whom Dolores evasively identifies as a prizefighter. Dolores invites the fighter, Pepe Alvarez, and Pepe's manager, Ed Sansom, to lunch one day, and Randolph recalls that it was an awkward meeting of people with not much in common. At this lunch Randolph sees behavior between Dolores and Pepe indicating that they had become lovers. Amazingly, though, Randolph finds that he is not jealous of Pepe but of Dolores, because Randolph is very attracted to Pepe.

Dolores soon learns of Randolph's feelings for Pepe and acknowledges that she has known about Randolph's homosexuality since the beginning of her relationship with Randolph. Dolores does not think Pepe is the right man for Randolph, but Randolph cannot erase Pepe from his thoughts. Seeing Pepe spending time with Dolores is especially difficult for Randolph, who does not declare his feelings to Pepe.

One night Pepe beats Dolores and vandalizes Randolph and Dolores's apartment and Randolph roams the streets and finds a young man with whom he has his first homosexual encounter.



Pepe, Ed, Dolores, and Randolph become an odd foursome and spend many hours together as friends until one night Randolph awakens to find that Dolores and Pepe have run away together. Randolph explores Dolores's overturned room and, sensing another person nearby, runs to his room to find his gun, thinking that Dolores has come back to make good on one of her violent dreams to kill Randolph. When Randolph's bedroom door opens, Randolph fires the gun, injuring not Dolores but Ed Sansom.

Ed lies wounded in the apartment for two days until Randolph summons his cousin Amy from the Landing. Amy finds a dwarf Negro doctor who tends to Ed day and night at the apartment. Eventually Ed recovers, although paralyzed, and he and Amy marry, fulfilling Amy's longtime dream to be a fulltime nurse. Ed, Amy and Randolph move into Skully's Landing and assume they will all die there together, in a house of misfits.

After Randolph finishes his story, Joel inquires about Pepe Alvarez, but Randolph does not know where Pepe is. Randolph then shows Joel a huge book listing every town in the world and tells Joel that he has been sending letters to the Postmasters of all those towns in the hope of locating Pepe. Randolph holds out little hope of actually finding Pepe, but the letter-writing process gives Randolph a sense of peace.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

At last Joel learns the circumstances surrounding his father's paralyzing injury as well as the relationship between Ed, Randolph, and Amy. Randolph's homosexuality, which has been alluded to throughout the novel, is also revealed to Joel. Randolph's cathartic revelations are not only illuminating to Joel but also beneficial to Randolph as part of his plan to create intimacy between himself and Joel: "'Do forgive me, darling Joel.' Then, in a voice as urgent as the bell, he added: 'And please, tell me what I want to hear.' Joel remembered. 'Everything,' he said gently, 'everything is going to be all right'" (chap. 8, p. 154). This bonding also is foreshadowing of the transitioning of power between Joel and Randolph that occurs at the end of the story.



Part 2, Chapters 9 and 10

Part 2, Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Jesus Fever is extremely ill. Zoo cares for her grandfather, who is experiencing hallucinations and talking out of his head. Zoo even builds a fire in the fireplace in the middle of the summer because Jesus Fever has unrelenting chills. Joel spends time with Zoo and Jesus Fever and hopes that the old man does not die because that will mean that Zoo will leave Skully's Landing. Joel says that he will protect Zoo from the threat of Keg should Keg return to the Landing, but Zoo is only amused at the slight boy's offer.

A week later Jesus Fever dies and Zoo prepares his body for burial and waits for two days until Randolph and Miss Amy designate the proper place for the burial. Randolph and Miss Amy lend no help in the burial, however, and Zoo and Joel are left to dig the hole and provide what little service they can to commit Jesus Fever's body to the ground.

Early the next morning Joel awakens and finds Zoo loaded down with most of her worldly possessions, ready to embark on her walk to Washington DC. Joel's anger about Zoo's departure is masked in haughtiness toward her until Zoo hugs him and swears to send for him after she gets established in the city.

Miss Amy and Randolph are furious about Zoo's unexpected departure, especially since they feel as if they had been very generous to Zoo and Jesus Fever for many years. Randolph tells Joel that Zoo will never return because no one can ever return to a place he or she has left.

Joel feeds Mr. Sansom some breakfast and wonders what it must be like never to be able to close your eyes like the invalid to whom he ministers. Joel tries to imagine his father as a vital man, but ultimately Mr. Sansom's unblinking stare leads Joel to the conclusion that his father is nothing but a pair of eyes. Joel's afternoon with his father is mercilessly interrupted by Idabel's whistle from outside the house. Joel stops briefly in his room to strap on the Civil War sword given to him by Jesus Fever shortly before the old man's death and runs outside to join Idabel.

Idabel reveals that she, Florabel, and their father had engaged in a brawl because their father tried to shoot Henry, Idabel's dog. Idabel has been wandering all night and has come to ask Joel to go with her to the traveling carnival and then to run away together. Idabel cautions Joel that she has no interest in getting married and prefers that they join the navy instead. Miss Amy hears Joel and Idabel's conspiratorial whispering and chastises Joel for leaving Mr. Sansom alone.

Joel has reached his tolerance threshold at the Landing and he and Idabel begin to run away as fast as they can toward Noon City. Joel and Idabel run through the woods



toward the Cloud Hotel so that Joel can pick up the charm promised to him by Little Sunshine. In an attempt to cross over the Drowning Pond, Joel and Amy step onto a rotting bridge beam and fall into the water. A snake rises out of the water and terrorizes Joel and Idabel until Idabel grabs Henry's sword to kill it. After this, Joel feels no need to continue to the Cloud Hotel because after triumphing over the snake, the charm is no longer necessary.

Part 2, Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Left by Zoo, the only person Joel feels cares about him at the Landing, Joel has no reason to stay after her departure. This feeling of loneliness is further emphasized by the lack of response from his father, whose almost vegetative state leaves Joel both repulsed and full of self pity. All Joel can see about his father are his father's perpetually open eyes. Even as Joel runs away with Idabel, Joel feels sure that his father can see his actions. This section is also important because it further establishes Idabel's masculine traits. This is especially evident when Idabel slashes the snake, a common symbol for the penis. This is a confusing situation to both Joel and Idabel, and foreshadows some homosexual tendencies for both characters.



Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

Miss Amy is furious with Joel for running away and laments the fact that no one has remembered that it is her birthday. Joel manages to get through dinner knowing that he and Idabel have plans to run away for good tonight. Joel finds a private moment with his father to tell him that he is leaving the Landing and then leaves Randolph's requested bottle of sherry in the hallway before escaping the house to where Idabel waits by the mailbox.

As Joel and Idabel run through the woods they encounter a Negro couple making love, a sight which makes Idabel tighten with repulsion but one that rivets Joel for its tenderness and connectedness between two people.

Before long, Joel and Idabel reach Noon City and find themselves in the middle of the traveling carnival. Among the sideshow events, Idabel and Joel are most fascinated by a midget named Miss Wisteria, who claims to be twenty-five years old but is dressed like a little girl. Idabel invites Miss Wisteria to join Joel and her for a soda and then they decide to ride the Ferris wheel. Joel feels pangs of jealousy to see Idabel riding with Miss Wisteria, wishing Idabel would come back to him at once.

When it is Joel's turn to ride with Miss Wisteria, he is appalled by Miss Wisteria's sexual advances and cannot wait for the ride to end. Joel finds himself thinking about Randolph and wishing that Randolph would rescue him from his current situation.

As the ride nears its end, a drenching rain hits and Joel runs away as soon as he exits the ride in search of Idabel. Not able to find Idabel, Joel takes refuge in an abandoned house in town and hides in repulsion when Miss Wisteria enters the dark house searching for Joel.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter is significant because Joel realizes his homosexuality. The feelings he has had for Idabel have been those of love and friendship, mostly spurned by the tomboy Idabel. When Miss Wisteria makes advanced toward Joel at the carnival, Joel finds that his first thoughts are of Randolph, whom Joel hopes will rescue him. No longer do Joel's desires for contact involve Idabel, and Joel is especially horrified when Miss Wisteria tracks him down to the abandoned house. Joel knows that he cannot give Miss Wisteria what she wants, yet still considers himself more fortunate than she because she will always be searching for a boy-sized man.



Part 3, Chapter 12

Part 3, Chapter 12 Summary

Joel awakens sporadically from wild hallucinations to see a sequence of Miss Amy, Randolph, and Zoo rocking in a chair beside his bed. After a few days of coming in and out of consciousness, Joel awakens relieved to see Randolph at his bedside. Randolph comforts Joel, who is worried that Randolph is mad at Joel for running away. This pattern of sleep and wakefulness continues for weeks as Joel recovers from the illness caught during the rainstorm at the carnival.

Randolph remains steadfastly by Joel's bed and Joel confides to Randolph that he is happy and content to be dependent upon Randolph for the rest of his life. Joel also notices that his physical appearance is taking a more chiseled, manly form with more shrewdness than innocence now.

One day Joel receives a postcard from Idabel, but Joel has lost interest in his former friend and throws the card into the fire. All of Joel's emotional attachments have been transferred to Randolph, but Joel is hesitant to share his feelings. Randolph tells Joel that Little Sunshine wants to see Joel, so Randolph and Joel will soon make the trip to the Cloud Hotel.

Joel thinks he is hallucinating again when he hears Zoo's voice coming toward his bedroom. Randolph tells Joel that Zoo has returned and helped nurse Joel back to health during the critical period of Joel's illness. When Zoo enters the room, Joel immediately sees that Zoo is not the same high-spirited woman who had left for Washington DC a few months ago. Zoo tells Joel that she had been sexually assaulted by four men as she walked along the road and has returned to the Landing because she does not have the heart to face the cruelty of the world she does not know.

A few days later Randolph and Joel mount Jesus Fever's mule, John Brown, for the trip to the Cloud Hotel. John Brown struggles from the weight of the two bodies as they make their way through the woods and the sandy area preceding the Drowning Pond. Little Sunshine spots the approaching party through his telescope and meets his guests halfway and leads them back to the ruins of the Cloud Hotel.

Joel is amazed to find that Little Sunshine lives in two immaculately appointed rooms in the middle of the decaying building. Little Sunshine ties a spittoon to John Brown's leg so that the men can hear the mule if it wanders away. Randolph, drunk from too much wine at a picnic lunch, collapses into a chair as Joel explores the upper floor of the building and soon falls asleep before the fire in Little Sunshine's apartment. Before long the comfortable silence is broken by a clanging and dragging noise, indicating that John Brown has somehow wandered upstairs.



Little Sunshine and Joel emerge from Little Sunshine's apartment to find John Brown on the second floor landing. Little Sunshine's demands that John Brown come down are met by the mule's frantic leap from the balcony, ending not in a crash but in the mule's hanging himself when his reins catch around his neck. The next morning, Randolph and Joel exit the hotel, leaving the dead mule's body hanging from the balcony and Little Sunshine asleep in his bedroom.

Joel is amazingly happy on the walk back to the Landing but cannot help but notice that Randolph appears to still be drunk and sullen. Before long though, Joel notices that Randolph is afflicted by something more than alcohol as Randolph walks incoherently in circles and Joel has to guide Randolph through the woods by Randolph's coat tail.

Reaching the Landing, Miss Amy informs Randolph that she has done just as Randolph had asked her; to tell Joel's Aunt Ellen that Randolph and Joel had gone away on a hunting trip. Zoo tells Joel that his Aunt Ellen had come for him and Joel's momentary disappointment disappears when Joel remembers that Aunt Ellen had never answered any of his letters. Joel inherently understands that the Landing is not his real home and he looks up at the house to see someone staring at him from an upstairs window. Joel realizes that the mysterious woman he had seen shortly after his arrival at the Landing is now smiling at him from Randolph's window. Joel enters the house no longer the boy he had been.

Part 3, Chapter 12 Analysis

Joel's illness after the carnival is a period of bizarre hallucinations that symbolizes a rite of passage into another life. A rite of passage is a ritual often involving hardship and deprivation from which a person emerges changed in a sexual or social behavior. Typically rites of passage involve boys undergoing trials and emerging stronger as young men. Joel's transformation involves rejecting any feelings for girls such as Idabel and transferring all his affections to Randolph. Even when it becomes clear that Randolph has manipulated the situation so that Joel would not be home when Aunt Ellen came in order to keep Joel with him, Joel still chooses Randolph, both out of loyalty and newfound homosexual feelings. Randolph, dressed as a woman and beckoning to Joel from the bedroom window at the end of the book, represents both male and female love interests for Joel, who is now confident in his choices and his fate for coming to live at the Landing.



Characters

Joel Knox

Joel Harrison Knox is the narrator and protagonist of the story. Joel's mother dies when Joel is twelve years old, and because Joel's father is not part of his life, Joel moves in with his aunt Ellen and her five children. Even though Aunt Ellen loves Joel, Joel never completely adapts to life in the household and exhibits behavioral issues. A day after Joel's thirteenth birthday, a letter arrives asking that Joel move to live with his father in a place called Skully's Landing somewhere deep in Louisiana. Joel's sense of order and his own sense of himself are tested when he is thrust in the middle of the lives of some very eccentric characters. During his time at the Landing, Joel learns that his father has been an invalid for many years and that the letter that had supposedly come from his father had actually been written by a man living at the Landing named Randolph. Joel explores a budding romantic attraction with a local girl named Idabel, whose own sexual identity issues keep Joel's limited advances at bay. Joel finds a surrogate mother in a highly-strung black woman named Zoo, and is intrigued by other ancillary characters who add intrigue and interest to Joel's life. Throughout the story, Joel's hope is to find love, and he explores it in some way with all the main characters, eventually finding it with Randolph, whose goal was to love Joel from the very beginning.

Randolph

Randolph is Amy's cousin and the other major character in the book. Randolph essentially initiates the story by writing the letter inviting Joel to come live at Skully's Landing. Even though the letter is written from Mr. Sansom's perspective, Joel later learns that it had been Randolph, not Mr. Sansom, who had actually written the letter. Joel first sees Randolph who appears as a female figure in one of the windows of the house and leads Joel on an intrigue about who the mysterious person could be. Randolph is a frustrated artist and attempts to paint Joel's portrait, although Randolph is much better at copying things, even reconstructing pictures of birds from actual feathers of dead creatures. Randolph, like Joel, has struggled with his sexual identity and has a brief relationship with a girl named Dolores before secretly falling in love with the prizefighter Pepe Alvarez. Randolph's fate turns when he accidentally shoots Edward after Pepe runs away with Dolores. Randolph spends his life attempting to locate Pepe by writing letters to the postmasters in all the cities and towns in the world. Although Randolph holds no real expectations of finding Pepe, the act of sending the letters gives Randolph hope and a sense of peace and anchors Randolph's affections in the past. Randolph's tenderness toward Joel, especially during Joel's illness at the end of the story, is very moving for Joel, who transfers his affections to Randolph, giving Randolph someone new to love.



Miss Amy

Miss Amy is the first person Joel encounters at Skully's Landing, as she attempts to catch a bird flying in Joel's bedroom. Miss Amy is married to Joel's father, Edward Sansom, who is the victim of an accidental shooting by Randolph. Amy comes to Randolph's aid after the shooting and nurses Edward's wounds, eventually marrying Edward so that she'll have someone to care for forever. Miss Amy brings Edward and Randolph back to her family's home to live at Skully's Landing and the threesome becomes an eccentric family unit. Even though it had been Miss Amy who had done Randolph the favor of helping the wounded Edward and bringing him to her home, Randolph maintains a powerful control over Miss Amy, making all the major and minor decisions for the household. Miss Amy is responsible for managing the house and Edward's care while also ministering to Randolph's petulant, drunken needs and enduring his cruel behavior toward her. Miss Amy had hoped that Joel's residence in the house would alleviate some of her daily responsibilities for Edward, but Joel wants nothing to do with Edward's care. This shirking of duty combined with Randolph's growing love for Joel make Joel a source of disdain for Miss Amy, who originally held out hope for a mutually beneficial relationship with Joel.

Edward Sansom

Edward Sansom is Joel's father, who Joel had never known. Edward is paralyzed, with extremely limited verbal skills, and is not able to interact with Joel. There is no real relationship between father and son, although Edward can move his eyes slightly to indicate that he is aware of Joel's presence. Edward's eyes become paramount for Joel, who senses that his father is watching him at all times. Joel wishes that his father could have a normal relationship with him, and transfers qualities that he would like to see in a parent. It is also through Edward's eyes that Joel feels he may be rejected by his father. Because there is no real dialogue between father and son, Edward's eyes become the main vehicle of communication between the two, but mostly Edward's eyes simply stare, never closing. Edward had been paralyzed when accidentally shot by Randolph, thinking he was being attacked by a crazy girlfriend. Randolph's guilt and Edward's wounds prompted Randolph to enlist the help of his cousin Amy, who eventually married Edward and took the threesome back to live at her family's crumbling Louisiana estate, Skully's Landing. Edward had been a manager to a prizefighter, Pepe Alvarez, whom Randolph had loved and lost, and Edward remains a connection for Randolph, however limited, to the long gone Pepe.

Idabel Thompkins

Idabel is a girl Joel meets on his first day traveling to Skully's Landing. Idabel is the twin sister to Florabel Thompkins, whose family lives close to the Landing. Joel's first sight of Idabel is her throwing rocks at the barber shop in Noon City with the barber offering Joel money to apprehend Idabel for punishment. Later that day, Idabel presents herself in the local restaurant where Joel sips a soda, and demands to know Joel's identity. Joel



encounters both Thompkins girls on his ride to the Landing and initially prefers Florabel for her long hair and feminine ways, but eventually is drawn to the tomboy ways of Idabel. Idabel spends time cultivating a friendship with Joel, who is somewhat romantically attracted to Idabel, but Idabel rejects even the slightest overtures from Joel. Eventually the relationship balance alters and Idabel adopts an even more masculine presence and dominates Joel both physically and emotionally. It is clear that Idabel struggles with her sexual preference and identity and finds herself attracted to a female midget at the carnival. At the end of the story, Joel's affections have transferred to Randolph and Joel rejects any attempts at any further communication from Idabel.

Missouri/Zoo Fever

Missouri Fever is Jesus Fever's granddaughter and also a resident at Skully's Landing. Joel first meets Missouri when she cooks breakfast for Joel on his first day at the Landing. Joel is struck by Missouri's generous and worldly manner and thinks that he may have found a surrogate mother figure. Missouri senses Joel's vulnerabilities and comforts Joel as he struggles to find his place in his new, eccentric family. Missouri lives in constant fear of the return of her violent husband, Keg Brown, who is away working on a chain gang as punishment for slashing Missouri's throat in a fit of rage. Missouri had married Keg when she was only fourteen years old and suffered the attack soon after the wedding. Missouri now cares for her ailing grandfather and conducts religious services for the two of them at the Landing. After Jesus Fever's death, Missouri leaves on foot for a better life in Washington DC, but returns soon after, the victim of a gang rape by four white men she encounters during her travels. At the end of the story, Missouri is just a shell of a woman, with all her high spirits smothered by grief and despair.

Jesus Fever

Jesus Fever is the extremely old black man who lives at Skully's Landing. Jesus Fever is Zoo's grandfather and also the man who drives the wagon carrying Joel to Skully's Landing upon his arrival in the area.

Sam Radclif

Sam Radclif is the truck driver for the Turpentine Company who drives Joel from Paradise Chapel to Noon City on his way to Skully's Landing.

Florabel Thompkins

Florabel Thompkins is Idabel Thompkins' twin sister, although the two are completely opposite in every way; Florabel is a lady while Idabel is the epitome of a tomboy.



Sydney Katz

Sydney Katz is the proprietor of the Morning Star Café in Paradise Chapel, Louisiana. Sydney arranges a ride for Joel to Noon City in Sam Radclif's truck.

Roberta V. Lacey

Roberta V. Lacey is the proprietress of the R.V. Lacey Princely Place in Noon City. Roberta likes Joel at their first meeting and is kind to him when others in the town are standoffish because Joel is a newcomer.

Keg Brown

Keg Brown is Zoo's husband who is serving time on a chain gang for slitting Zoo's neck shortly after their marriage.

Mr. Mystery, Annie Rose Kuppermann, and Edward Q. Sansom

Mr. Mystery, Annie Rose Kuppermann, and Edward Q. Sansom are imaginary friends of Joel's who live in the other rooms in his head.

Aunt Ellen

Aunt Ellen is Joel's mother's sister in whose care Joel is placed upon the death of his mother.

Little Sunshine

Little Sunshine is a little black man who is a hermit living at the abandoned Cloud Hotel.

Pepe Alvarez

Pepe Alvarez is the prizefighter managed by Edward Sansom. Pepe enters into a romantic relationship with Dolores, Randolph's girlfriend, and Randolph finds that his romantic affections are transferred to Pepe instead of Dolores. Pepe and Dolores run away and Randolph spends the rest of his life trying to locate Pepe by writing to postmasters in all the cities of the world.



Dolores

Dolores is Randolph's violent and bad-tempered girlfriend who enters into a romantic relationship with Pepe Alvarez, a coupling which will end in tragedy.

Miss Wisteria

Miss Wisteria is a midget who performs at the traveling carnival visited by Joel and Idabel. Idabel finds herself oddly attracted to Miss Wisteria, who is more interested in Joel and makes unwanted sexual advances toward the boy.



Objects/Places

Morning Star Café

The Morning Star Café is located in Paradise Chapel, Louisiana, and is the site where Joel meets Sam Radclif, who gives Joel a ride to Noon City.

Skully's Landing

Skully's Landing is the ancestral Louisiana home of Amy Skully who marries Edward Sansom. The Landing is the site of the main activity in the novel.

Noon City

Noon City, Louisiana, is the nearest town to Skully's Landing and where Joel first meets some of the people who will become important in his new life.

R.V. Lacey's Princely Place

R.V. Lacey's Princely Place is the only real store in Noon City and is owned by Roberta V. Lacey a highly spirited woman who takes an initial liking to Joel.

John Brown, the mule

John Brown, Jesus Fever's mule, pulls Jesus' wagon on trips to town, pulls Jesus' body to his grave, and ultimately dies by hanging at the Cloud Hotel.

Pianola

A pianola is a player piano which plays pre-programmed music. Aunt Amy loves the sound of the pianola, but Joel very rarely lets her hear it.

Drowning Pond

Drowning Pond is near the Cloud Hotel, where fables of drowned victims coming back to life keep the local residents at bay.

Red Ball

The red ball is used by Edward Sansom as his signal that he needs attention.



The Carnival

Joel and Idabel attend the carnival in Noon City, where they encounter Miss Wisteria.

Washington DC

Missouri's dream is to live in Washington DC where she feels her life will be better free of the unrelenting Southern sun and where she will be able to see snow.

Social Sensitivity

In this, his first novel, Truman Capote is concerned less about social issues than about personal themes; however, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* does emphasize the important role of family in the development of the individual. Joel Knox's family is typical of those found in Capote's novels; in effect he has no family.

His mother is dead, his father never is really a presence in his life, and he must create his own version of family as he defines his relationship to other individuals, most of whom are as isolated as he.

Until he can experience some type of familial love, he remains the outsider and social misfit.

Perhaps because of his own unhappy childhood and his somewhat strained relationship with his mother, Capote often portrays young men who find nurturing, maternal influences in a character other than the biological parent. After the mother's death in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, the father can claim Joel for whatever designs the other characters, especially Randolph, have on him, but the father is almost a cipher except as a tool to advance the plot.

Another major concern is the conflict between community values and individual values. Joel first becomes aware of this conflict when he realizes that he is not accepted by his schoolmates in New Orleans, but the dimensions of that conflict are made clear to him shortly after his arrival in Noon City, when the barber, the beautician, and the cafe owner all condemn Idabel Thompkins for her refusal to wear a dress or behave in a ladylike manner. The conflict between individuality and social convention is further developed when Joel meets Idabel's twin sister, Florabel, who observes all the rules of dress and etiquette. One of the links between Idabel and Miss Wisteria is their common perception of themselves as "freaks" or social pariahs. Even Amy Skully eventually succumbs to the rule of society, trying to gain Randolph's favor by telling him how "good" she was: "... I wore my nice grey dress, . . . made little tea-cakes, and the house was so clean, and really she liked me"



Techniques

As in most Capote novels, locales are described in minute physical detail. These descriptions are impressionistic; they define the essential nature of the place itself and Joel's emotions as he observes his surroundings. For example, shortly after he arrives at Skully's Landing, Joel looks out the window at the garden, which to him reflects the loneliness and despair he sees in the household: "Below, under a fiery surface of sum waves, a garden, a jumbled wreckage of zebrawood and lilac, elephant-ear plant and weeping willow, the lace-leaved limp branches shimmering delicately, and dwarfed cherry trees, like those in oriental prints, sprawled raw and green in the noon heat. It was not a result of simple neglect, this tangled oblong area, but rather the outcome, it appeared, of someone having, in a riotous moment, scat tered about it a wild assortment of seed."

In this blend of customary Southern garden plants with wild grasses and vines, Joel sees "the primitive, haunted look of a lost ruin" and Capote provides a concrete image of the decay in the Skully-Lee family.

Similarly, descriptions of a character's room provide insight into that individual's personality. When Joel first visits Randolph's room, he does not yet understand that Randolph is not a true artist but an emotionally weak and destructive dilettante, but Capote strongly hints at this situation: . . . faded gold and tarnished silk reflecting in ornate mirrors, it all made him feel as though he had eaten too much candy. Large as the room was, the barren space in it amounted to no more than one foot; carved tables, velvet chairs, candelabras, a German music box, books and paintings seemed to spill each into the other, as if the objects in a flood had floated through the windows and sunk here.

Capote also uses a welter of physical details and chaotic syntax to create the novel's overall atmosphere of dream and, more frequently, nightmare. In the abandoned house, when Joel believes he is lost and perhaps dying, his surroundings reflect this nightmarish experience: A boom of silence answered him; here, there, a marginal sound: rain like wings in the chimney, mice feet on fallen glass, maidenly steps of her who always walks on the stair, and wind, opening doors, closing them, wind conversing on the ceiling, blowing its damp sour breath in his face, breathing out its lungs through the rooms: he let himself be carried in its course: his head was light as a balloon, and a hollow-feeling; ice as eyes, thorns as teeth, flannel as tongue; he'd seen sunrise that morning, but, each step directing him nearing a precipice permanent in its shadowed intent (or so it seemed), it was not likely he would see another Finally, as in his other novels, Capote extensively uses symbolic objects and characters. For instance, Ed Samson's inability to communicate is seen in the balls he bounces down the stairs to gain the attention of his care-givers. When Joel decides to run away, the bouncing balls are no deterrent. Samson himself appears to be a symbolic character: To Amy he represents the totally dependent charge she has always wanted, to Randolph he is the last link with Pepe Alvarez, and for Joel he is both the fantasy of paternal approval and the guilt of being judged inadequate and thus being rejected. Perhaps Capote intends



him to symbolize the spiritual weakness and psychological paralysis of the entire household.

Other symbolic characters include Pepe Alvarez and Mr. Mystery. In Pepe, Randolph sees the security to be found in the elusive perfect relationship, but Pepe has rejected him, and Randolph's attempts to communicate with him are doomed to failure. To Joel, Mr. Mystery represents a similar escape from loneliness, but also a magic antidote for the fear associated with unpleasant situations and everyday reality.

Places such as the swampy forest obviously reflect Joel's confusion and terror, and the ruined Cloud Hotel seems to suggest the grim fate that can befall even the most beautiful and pleasant places; yet Little Sunshine cannot escape its influence, regardless of where he attempts to flee. This hotel has already consumed its owner, just as Skully's Landing appears about to consume Randolph, Amy, and probably Joel.

Equally symbolic are Randolph's blue jay and the colored glasses Idabel won at an earlier carnival. Amy has killed a living bird so that Randolph can construct a beautiful, but lifeless and artificial, facsimile. Neither Amy nor Randolph can understand that the "real" bird is superior.

In the same way, once Joe breaks Idabel's glasses, she no longer sees the sideshow "freaks" for the frauds they are, and she becomes infatuated with Miss Wisteria, the heavily painted midget. Again only Joel perceives the reality of the situation.



Themes

Isolation

All the important characters in the book have been ostracized by society or are on the outside by circumstances both within and beyond their control. Joel is essentially an orphan due to his mother's death and his father's paralysis. Joel never fits in with his aunt's family and misbehaves as a way of showing resentment for his situation. Joel's father, Edward Sansom, is the most physically isolated character in the book due to his paralysis and inability to communicate. Miss Amy's isolation appears in the form of being married to a paralyzed man with whom she has a caregiver's relationship, not one of love. Randolph is isolated because of his homosexuality with which he comes to terms after the attraction to Pepe Alvarez. As an artist, Randolph shows more sensitivity than most men and feels things deeply, qualities which were probably unattractive to Pepe, whose macho identity would have never entertained any type of relationship with Randolph. Missouri is also isolated because she is a black woman living and working at the Landing located in a remote region of Louisiana. Missouri is a young woman and wants to find a man to love, and especially wants to escape the mental and physical reminders of the husband who brutalized her. Idabel is also an isolated character, partly because of her tomboy mannerisms and also by her burgeoning homosexual tendencies.

Love

The quest for love is an important theme in the book, primarily in the character of Joel, who seeks it in almost everyone he encounters. Joel had never known his father and his mother dies at an early age, leaving Joel a virtual orphan. Joel is sent to live with his Aunt Ellen who loves him, but Joel needs more attention than that bestowed on him in a household of five other children. Joel misbehaves and cuts school in obvious attempts for attention that never comes. The invitation to come live at Skully's Landing lightens Joel's heart at the thought of connecting with his father and forging a bond, but Joel's hopes are dashed when he finds that his father is a paralyzed invalid, unable to communicate. Missouri becomes almost a surrogate mother figure to Joel and he begs her to love him and take him with her when she leaves for Washington DC. Joel also explores love with Idabel, who rejects Joel's small overtures in favor of a tomboy relationship. Miss Amy yearns for love but will not find it in a house occupied by an invalid husband and a domineering cousin. Joel's quest for love is matched by Randolph's pitiful yearnings for Pepe Alvarez, who has long ago disappeared, completely unaware of Randolph's feelings for him. Eventually the two who seek love most avidly, Joel and Randolph, find it in each other, and the novel ends with this realization shared by both.



Death and Transition

Many of Capote's stories involve transitions due to death, especially the impact of death on young children who are orphaned and forced to alter their lives through no choice of their own. Joel's mother dies early, which also ends life as Joel has known it, and he is forced to live with relatives who love him but don't understand him. Joel's mother's death forces a rite of passage on Joel, who continues to experience other transitions throughout the book as a result. Jesus Fever also dies soon after Joel meets him, but Joel more readily accepts Jesus Fever's death not only because the loss does not impact his life to such a degree, but also because Jesus Fever is a very old man and Joel accepts the progression of life's cycles. The unusual hanging death of John Brown, Jesus Fever's mule, at the end of the story signifies the important transition for Joel's entry into adulthood. Joel can no longer be carried on his life's journey as the mule had carried Randolph and him to the Cloud Hotel where the death occurs. Randolph and Joel are forced to walk home, a trip too arduous for the overweight and delicate Randolph, who mentally and physically collapses during the short trip. This walk home signifies the shift in the relationship between Joel and Randolph, with Joel assuming a more dominant role as he moves into manhood.

Significant Topics

Like many of Capote's young male protagonists, Joel Harrison Knox is essentially an orphan. Alienated from his schoolmates because of his delicate—almost effeminate—appearance, he decides he resembles Little Kay in "The Snow Queen," and because his life seems to lack emotional warmth, he wonders if he too has been spirited off to a frozen palace. He feels comfortable only when he is sharing his lunch with a Negro stevedore or when Mr. Mystery selects him as a volunteer during the magic show. Further isolated by the death of his mother, Joel has been taken in by his aunt, Ellen Kendall, but he is an outsider in this household too. Even though the family treats him well, he resents them and often is cruel, especially to his deaf cousin, Louise. When his father, Ed Samson, invites Joel to come and live with him at Skully's Landing, the naive boy eagerly anticipates finally meeting the dashing figure who has been the subject of his fantasies. For most of the novel, however, Joel finds himself an outsider at Skully's Landing, and he writes several letters asking Ellen to come and rescue him from his new "family": a paralyzed father, a stepmother whose behavior is bizarre at best, and her drag queen cousin, Randolph. Only when his abortive escape attempt ends in his serious illness, and Randolph nurses him back to health, does Joel begin to realize that now he has become a necessary part of the household at Skully's Landing.

In *Other Voices, Other Rooms* a major theme is coming of age. When Joel leaves New Orleans for Skully's Landing, he is essentially a child, but at the novel's end, he senses his own maturation and looks back with detachment on the child he used to be. Finally he can acknowledge the sexual attraction he feels for Randolph. Moreover, he realizes that his is the stronger personality and that only he can provide the reassurance Randolph needs—that everything will be all right.



Their excursion to the Cloud Hotel reveals Randolph's total helplessness, but upon their return, Joel also realizes that actually he is still alienated, not only from his "bloodkin," but now also from the misfits who have been his only companions.

Like Joel and Randolph, most of the characters in this novel lack a sense of security, but often, as they desperately seek to escape imagined dangers, they encounter real dangers far more serious.

For example, Missouri Fever wants to flee Skully's Landing before Keg Brown is released from prison and returns to cut her throat. Finally freed by her grandfather's death, she begins walking to Washington, only to be gang-raped. She then returns to Skully's Landing. Likewise Idabel Thompkins runs away from the father and sister she believes will destroy her individuality, only to fall under the spell of Miss Wisteria, the carnival midget, who appears to have sexual designs on her.

Throughout the novel, Capote emphasizes the interrelated themes of death and change. In each of the three sections, a death significantly changes Joel's world.

In Part One, Joel's mother dies and he leaves the family he has always known to go and live with his father. Not only does he travel on his own from New Orleans to Skully's Landing, but he finds himself in a household dominated by physical and psychological weakness. He must determine for himself what is reality and what is delusion, but, at the same time, he feels completely alone and defenseless. In Part Two, Jesus Fever dies. Because of Jesus' great age, Joel had come to consider him almost immortal, but the old man's death reenforces the concept of mutability.

Moreover, when Missouri no longer has to care for her grandfather, she leaves Skully's Landing, and Joel believes he has lost his only ally within the household.

For that reason he agrees to run away with Idabel. The death in Part Three is that of John Brown, the mule. When Joel and Randolph leave the Cloud Hotel, Joel allows Randolph to lead him so that he can keep his eyes shut and thus avoid looking at the body of John Brown, but this represents the last vestige of his childhood. Without the mule, Joel and Randolph must walk back to Skully's Landing, and Joel learns that Randolph can merely travel in a circle, which reflects "the zero of his nothingness."

When Joel directs their journey home, he assumes the adult role relinquished by Randolph. At the novel's end, Joel appears to have become the head of the household, as he rejects "bloodkin" and moves toward the mysterious "woman" beckoning to him from Randolph's window.

Style

Point of View

The story is told in the first person narrative limited point of view. This means that the author uses the narrator, Joel Knox, to tell the story so all the events and the characters are viewed from his perspective. Because the point of view is limited, however, means that Joel cannot share the thoughts and feelings of the other characters so the reader has a limited perspective on those characters, learning only what can be shared through Joel's thoughts and the actions of those characters on their own. This means that the person telling the story is the author himself and he delivers his views and relates events according to his own perception of them. The narrator does not supply any insight into the motives, feelings or actions of any other people and can only relate instances about these people from his own point of view. When there are conversations detailed, the narrator can simply relate what the other person says, and although the narrator may guess at the other person's thoughts, he cannot share them with the reader.

Setting

The most important location in the book is Skully's Landing where the majority of the plot line extends. Skully's Landing is located in a remote spot in Louisiana a day's journey away from Joel's home with Aunt Ellen in Ponchartrain. On Joel's journey he must make stops in Paradise Chapel and Noon City before finding a ride which will take him the rest of the way to Skully's Landing. Ancillary locations include the Cloud Hotel, the Drowning Pond and the woods and swamp area surrounding Skully's Landing. Joel also spends time at the home of the Thompkins twins for brief visits and enjoys spending time in Missouri's cabin where he feels comforted. The carnival in Noon City is an interesting location not only for its sideshow eccentricities but also for the transitional phases it represents for both Joel and Idabel. Joel also hides out in an abandoned house during the carnival to avoid the over zealous attentions of Miss Wisteria. There are also more intimate settings such as the bedrooms in the house each crammed with antique furniture and mementos from past lives. Although not part of the main plot line, Randolph experiences life in European cities as well as cities on the east coast of the United States.

Language and Meaning

Capote is well known for his beautifully descriptive language and this novel follows that pattern. Capote wants the reader to not only understand the plot but also the feelings and emotions that surround the story's actions. For example, when Capote describes Joel's waking in his bedroom on his first morning at Skully's Landing, he writes, "falling... Falling... FALLING! a knifelike shaft, an underground corridor, and he was spinning like



a fan blade through metal spirals; at the bottom a yawning-jawed crocodile followed his downward whirl with hooded eyes: as always, rescue came with wakefulness. The crocodile exploded in sunshine. Joel blinked and tasted his tongue and did not move; the bed, an immense four-poster with different rosewood fruits carved crudely on its high headboard, was suffocatingly soft and his body had sunk deep in its feathery center. Chapter 2, Page 40 This is a much more evocative way to tell how Joel awakens from a deep sleep to take in his environment for the very first time. Capote masterfully uses this style during the descriptions of Joel's hallucinations and dreams where he utilizes imaginary characters in absurd situations to escape his realities.

Structure

The book is written in twelve chapters divided into three parts. The first part represents Joel's personal dilemma of being orphaned and his need to adapt to ever changing circumstances. In this section Joel's mother dies and he must live with his Aunt Ellen and her children. Joel then receives the letter inviting him to live with his father at Skully's Landing where Joel encounters the major characters. The second part is Joel's rite of passage as he struggles with the issues of love, betrayal and death. Joel learns the intricacies of eccentric relationships as this section provides Joel with new experiences. Finally, the third part is Joel's recognition of the source of love in his life and his acceptance of his new reality. Joel understands the depth of Randolph's feelings for him and the two enter into an unspoken bond of tentative love. Capote intersperses the plot line with colorful dialogue and well-defined events as well as highly descriptive sections of Joel's dreams and hallucinations. Sometimes it is unclear to the reader what is reality and what is fantasy because the writing melds together flawlessly. In some instances the passages need to be reread because of Capote's sometimes obscure style and this can slow down the pacing of the book but overall the book is a straightforward story of a boy's coming of age despite difficult circumstances.



Quotes

"It was as if he lived those months wearing a pair of spectacles with green, cracked lenses, and had wax-plugging in his ears, for everything seemed to be something it wasn't, and the days melted in a constant dream." Chap. 1, p. 10

"He was glad to go. He could not think why, nor did he bother wondering, but his father's more or less incredible appearance on a scene strangely deserted twelve years before didn't strike him as in the least extraordinary, inasmuch as he'd counted on some such happening all along." Chap. 1, p. 12

"And then sitting alone in the quiet kitchen, he was taken with a terrible idea: what if his father had seen him already? Indeed, had been spying on him ever since he arrived, was, in fact, watching him at this very moment? An old house like this would most likely be riddled with hidden passages, and picture-eyes that were not eyes at all, but peepholes. And his father thought: that runt is an imposter; my son would be taller and stronger and handsomer and smarter-looking. Suppose he'd told Miss Amy: give the little faker something to eat and send him on his way. And dear sweet Lord, where would he go? Off to foreign lands where he'd set himself up as an organ grinder with a little doll-clothed monkey, or a blind-boy street singer, or a beggar selling pencils." Chap. 2, p. 51

"It was though a brutal hawk had soared down and clawed away Joel's eyelids, forcing him to gape at her throat. Zoo. Maybe she was like him, and the world had a grudge against her, too. But christamighty he didn't want to end up with a scar like that. Except what chance have you got when there is always trickery in one hand, and danger in the other. No chance whatsoever. None." Chap. 3, p. 72

"But there was no prayer in Joel's mind; rather, nothing a net of words could capture, for, with one exception, all his prayers of the past had been simple concrete requests: God, give me a bicycle, a knife with seven blades, a box of oil paints. Only how, how, could you say something to indefinite, so meaningless as this: God, let me be loved." Chap. 3, p. 73

"Randolph bent forward. 'A charming boy, little Joel, dear Joel,' he whispered. 'Try to be happy here, try a little to like me, will you?'" Chap. 4, p. 86

"Miss Florabel Thompkins pulled a comb through her red waist-length hair, the blunt noon-sun paling each strand, and said: 'Now don't you know I'm just tickled to see you. Why, only this morning I was telling sister: 'Sister, I got a feeling we're going to have company.' Said, 'So let's wash our hair,' which naturally made no hit whatsoever: never washes nothing, that girl.'" Chap. 5, p. 101

"Joel had known and explored other houses quiet with emptiness, but none so deserted-looking, silent: it was as though the place were captured under a cone of



glass; inside, waiting to claim him, was an afternoon of endless boredom: each step, and his shoes were heavy as though soled with stone, carried him closer. A whole afternoon. And how many more for how many months?" Chap. 5, p. 110

"'Aw,' said Joel, 'aw, I was just joking, honest,'" and, hugging her, smothered his face against her middle; she smelled sweet, a curious dark sour sweet, and her fingers, gliding through his hair, were cool, strong. 'I love you because you've got to love me because you've got to.'" Chap. 6, p. 117

"So why did they pretend? Why didn't they say right out, 'There is no Mr. Sansom, you have no father,' and send him away. Ellen was always talking of the decent Christian thing to do; he'd wondered what she meant, and now he knew: to speak truth was a decent Christian thing." Chap. 6, p. 118

"Reflected in this mirror were a pair of eyes: the instant Joel became aware of them his gaze dismissed all else. The eyes were a teary grey; they watched Joel with a kind of dumb glitter, and soon, as if to acknowledge him they closed in a solemn double wink, and turned . . . so that he saw them only as part of a head, a shaved head lying with invalid looseness on unsanitary pillows." Chap. 6, p. 121

"'It's just my old suit,' he said, afraid to go back and change, for Amy might say no he could not go, might, instead, make him read to his father. And his father, like Angela Lee, was paralyzed, helpless; he could say a few words (boy, why, kind, bad, ball, ship), move his head a little (yes, no), and one arm (to drop a tennis ball, the signal for attention). All pleasure, all pain, he communicated with his eyes, and his eyes, like windows in summer, were seldom shut, always open and staring, even in sleep." Chap. 7, p. 125

"Before birth; yes, what time was it then? A time like now, and when they were dead, it would be still like now: these trees, that sky, this earth, those acorn seeds, sun and wind, all the same, while they, with dust-turned hearts, change only. Now at thirteen Joel was nearer a knowledge of death than in any year to come: a flower was blooming inside him, and soon, when all tight leaves unfurled, when the noon of youth burned whitest, he would turn and look, as others had, for the opening of another door." Chap. 7, p. 127

"He wanted to say: no, Idabel, dear Idabel, I am your good true friend. And he wanted to touch her, to put his arms around her, for this seemed suddenly the only means of expressing all he felt. Pressing closer, he reached and, with breathtaking delicacy, kissed her cheek. There was a hush; tenuous moods of light and shade seem to pass between them like the leaf-shadow trembling on their bodies. Then Idabel tightened all over. She grabbed hold of his hair and started to pull, and when she did this a terrible, and puzzled rage went through Joel. This was the real betrayal." Chap. 7, p. 135

"'Let me begin by telling you that I was in love. An ordinary statement, to be sure, but not an ordinary fact, for so few of us learn that love is tenderness, and tenderness is not, as a fair proportion suspect, pity; and still fewer know that happiness in love is not



the absolute focusing of all emotion in another: one has always to love a good many things which the beloved must come only to symbolize; the true beloveds of this world are in their lover's eyes lilac opening, ship lights, school bells, a landscape, remembered conversations, friends, a child's Sunday, lost voices, one's favorite suit, autumn and all seasons, memory, yes, it being the earth and water of existence, memory." Chap. 8, p. 142

"Aside from all else, there is some truth in that; clocks indeed must have their sacrifice: what is death but an offering to time and eternity?" Chap. 8, p. 144

"'Mama was always cold, too,' said Joel, prickly chill tingling his spine. Don't die, he thought, and as he pushed the chair back and forth the runners whispered, don't die, don't die. For if Jesus Fever died, then Zoo would go away, and there would be no one but Amy, Randolph, his father. It was not so much these three, however, but the Landing, and the fragile hush of living under a glass bell." Chap. 9, p. 156

"What was it like almost never to shut your eyes, always to be forever reflecting the same ceiling, light, faces, furniture, dark? But if the eyes could not escape you, neither could you avoid them; they seemed indeed sometime to permeate the room, their damp greyness covering all like mist; and if those eyes were to make tears they would not be normal tears, but something grey, perhaps green, a color at any rate, and solid, like ice." Chap. 10, p. 170

"Every once in a while he was tantalized by a sense of guilt: he ought to feel more for Mr. Sansom than he did, he ought to try and love him. If only he'd seen Mr. Sansom! Then he could have gone on picturing him as looking this and that wonderful way, as talking in a kind strong voice, as being really his father. Certainly this Mr. Sansom was not his father. This Mr. Sansom was nobody but a pair of crazy eyes." Chap. 10, p. 171

"Tenderly he took Mr. Sansom's hand and put it against his cheek and held it there until there was warmth between them; he kissed the dry fingers, and the wedding ring whose gold had been meant to encircle them both. 'I'm leaving, Father,' he said, and it was, in a sense, the first time he'd acknowledged their blood; slowly he rose up and pressed his palms on either side of Mr. Sansom's face and brought their lips together: 'My only father,' he whispered, turning, and, descending the stairs, he said it again, but this time all to himself." Chap. 11, p. 185

"'Well, this is surely a treat,' she said. 'Now lots of show people are just plain put-ons, but I don't hold with any put-on, I like to bring my art to the people . . . lots of whom don't see how come I jog around with an outfit like this . . . look, they say to me, there you were out in Hollywood pulling down a thousand dollars a week as Shirley Temple's stand-in . . . but I say to them: the road to happiness isn't always a highway.'" Chap. 11, p. 192

"One afternoon the rocking chair became precisely that; scissors seemed to cut round



the edges of his mind, and as he peeled away the dead discardings, Randolph, taking shape, shone blessedly near." Chap. 12, p. 206

"So sometimes he came near to speaking out his love for him; but it was unsafe ever to let anyone guess the extent of your feelings or knowledge: suppose, as he often had, that he were kidnapped; in which case the wisest defense would be not to let the kidnapper know you recognized him as such. If concealment is the single weapon, then a villain is never a villain: one smiles to the very end." Chap. 12, p. 211

"A face trembled like a white beautiful moth, smiled. She beckoned to him, shining and silver, and he knew he must go: unafraid, not hesitating, he paused only at the garden's edge where, as though he'd forgotten something, he stopped and looked back at the bloomless, descending blue, at the boy he had left behind." Chap. 12, p. 231

Key Questions

Other Voices, Other Rooms—Truman Capote's first published novel—was critically acclaimed when it was published in 1948, but its popularity has declined in recent years. Perhaps the complex pattern of symbolism and multiple plot layers are confusing to today's readers.

Since the entire narrative is filtered through Joel's consciousness, and much of the action takes place within his mind, the novel is heavily infused with ambiguity, and though its landscape of dream and nightmare may resemble that of modern fantasy literature, its surreal elements can no longer be considered unique or experimental. Readers could profitably analyze this novel in the literary context of its era, noting that its deliberate references to artifice and established constructs show a relationship to both postwar novels and the theater of the absurd. Other themes deserving of such exploration include the isolation of the individual, people's failure to communicate, and characters' search for love and security. Likewise, Capote's views of one's relationship to society and social conventions could be explored, as could his theme of initiation.

1. Like many of Capote's young male protagonists, Joel Knox is the perennial outsider seeking his place in the world.

This novel traces his initiation into the adult world and the process by which he establishes himself in that world. What does he learn from each of the adult characters, and what role does he assume as the novel ends?

2. Joel thinks of his situation as parallel to that of Little Kay in "The Snow Queen." What is the role of Little Kay in this story, and how does it resemble Joel's role in this novel?

3. Why do Amy and Randolph bring Joel to Skully's Landing? What role, if any, does Ed have in this decision? How is Joel's life at Skully's Landing different from his life in New Orleans? What does Skully's Landing represent to each of the characters? To the novelist?

4. A major theme of this novel is the search for love. What types of love does Joel observe and experience during the novel? Do any of these types provide the sense of security that Joel and the other characters seem to need? In what ways does each succeed or fail?

5. Like his contemporary, Flannery O'Connor, Capote seems to emphasize the grotesque in his characters. Identify some of these grotesque elements and demonstrate how Capote uses each to achieve a specific comedic or comic effect.



6. Capote divides this novel into three major parts. What is the purpose of this division? Does each part represent a subtle shift in theme or a different stage in Joel's emerging maturity?

7. Failures in communication are a causative element in the characters' alienation from each other and from society as a whole. Some letters are never delivered; others convey messages which are simply deceptive. Identify the situations in which written and oral communication are frustrated in this novel, and explain the effects of each such failure.

8. Capote consistently relies upon symbolism to reenforce his major themes. Identify several concrete symbols—such as Mabel's glasses or Little Sunshine's?—and show how each of these is directly related to the novel's themes.

9. Most of the characters are and remain outsiders, some sympathetic and others less so. How does Capote use the outsider to emphasize the individual's essential alienation in the modern world?

What hope, if any, does he suggest?

10. Dreams and illusions play an important role in this novel, as Capote demonstrates the ambiguous nature of reality. Cite specific examples of these dreams and illusions, and show how each reenforces the novel's theme.



Topics for Discussion

What is the real reason Joel is invited to live at Skully's Landing? Do you think Edward has any knowledge of the letter supposedly written by him?

Joel is forced to adapt to sudden and strange events in his life. Discuss some of Joel's coping mechanisms and the outcomes.

At the end of the book, Joel transfers his feelings of affection from Idabel to Randolph. Why do you think this transition occurs?

Discuss the theme of life and death in the book and the symbolism you find for each.

Compare Capote to other writers you have read, especially the differences and similarities between Capote's definite Southern style in contrast to authors from other regions and countries.

Capote usually writes about topics that mirror his own life, such as isolation and homosexuality. Discuss the relevance of these topics to this book.

Do you find any compassion for any of the characters? Are any of them more likable or distasteful compared to the others? Explain.

Literary Precedents

The themes of failed communication, misdirected love, insecurity, and isolation of the individual are reminiscent of Carson McCullers' fiction, and the physically grotesque characters who combine caricature and pathos may reflect the additional influence of Erskine Caldwell. The oratorical diction and dense syntax remind the reader of other Southern novelists such as William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. The extensive symbolism resembles the symbolic naturalism of Stephen Crane; and both the extensive use of surreal dream imagery and the manipulation of point of view suggests James Joyce. Although Capote never credited any of these influences, critics and other novelists have pointed out the distinct parallels.



Related Titles

In his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Capote introduces recurring characters, most notably the young male orphan and the eccentric females who take him into their household. Each of these young boys—initially an outsider —finds a sense of belonging as he gains maturity and self-knowledge from his experiences with these women. The young boys in other novels, such as *A Christmas Memory* (1966) and *The Grass Harp* (1951; see separate entry), become the wards of sisters—one loveably eccentric and the other practical and authoritarian. Here, though, the practical and somewhat cruel woman is Joel's stepmother Amy and the eccentric relative is her cousin Randolph, who at least twice appears dressed as an exotic lady. Amy's devotion to Randolph also resembles the relationship between Kate McCloud and P. B. Jones in *Answered Prayers* (1975-76), as well as that of Holly Golightly and the narrator of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958; see separate entry).



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