

The Analysis of the Talented Mr. Ripley Novel

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Abstract— The Talented Mr. Ripley is a psychological thriller novel that delves into the complexity of human identity, socioeconomic class, and the American Dream through themes such as deception, envy, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment. Written by Patricia Highsmith and released in 1955, the novel has received widespread recognition for its nuanced characterization of the protagonist, Tom Ripley, who expertly embodies the psychological and moral complications of these themes. The novel addresses essential themes concerning the nature of human identity and how social rank, class, and the American Dream impact our goals, ideals, and our actions through critical reading and analysis of the text. This novel is not just a page-turner but also a literary work that offers a comprehensive review of human psychology, morals, and the society in which we live.

Keywords— Mr. Ripley, socioeconomic class, American Dream, deception, envy.

I. INTRODUCTION

This Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a psychological thriller that delves into themes of identity, class, and the American Dream. The novel was initially published in 1955 and has since received widespread recognition for its thorough analysis of these themes (Highsmith, 1999). The plot revolves around Tom Ripley, a young guy who becomes entangled in a hazardous game of deceit and murder while attempting to take the identity of a wealthy acquaintance, Dickie Greenleaf. Highsmith deftly used the character of Ripley and his friendship with Dickie to explore the difficulties of postwar identity and class in America (Minghella et al., 1999).

Identity is a key theme in the novel. Ripley, who is a virtuoso at disguise and mimicry, is continuously troubled by the question of who he is, says Highsmith (Miller, 2015). Throughout the novel, Ripley strives to identify himself and his role in the world, which leads him to take the identity of a friend, Dickie Greenleaf. Even as he takes this new character, he cannot escape the notion that he is an impostor. This theme is further developed by Ripley's friendship with Dickie, as Ripley grows increasingly resentful of Dickie's affluent existence, driving him to desire to become him. Highsmith's novel is a superb investigation of the fluid nature of identity and how it is created by our desires and anxieties (Stolarek, 2018).

Class is another major theme in the novel. The novel is set in the 1950s, in postwar America when the concept of the American Dream was gaining traction. The novel's core topic is the concept of upward mobility and the opportunity to rise beyond one's place in life. Highsmith explores the impact of

class on Tom Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf's lives and relationships via their characters. Ripley, who comes from a working-class family, is envious of Dickie's riches and luxury, but he is also conscious of the limits that come with his background (Tuss, 2004), (Mohammed and Thabit, 2015).

Finally, the novel delves into the theme of the American Dream. According to Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a novel that is strongly concerned with the concept of the American Dream and how it impacts the lives of its protagonists (Highsmith, 2007), (Thabit and Mohammed, 2017). The concept of the American Dream is developed to study the characters' motives, notably Tom Ripley's, and how they are driven by their desire for achievement and acceptance. The story finally demonstrates that the American Dream is a difficult and often frightening journey plagued with moral issues, rather than a straight road to pleasure and satisfaction (King, 1961), (Mohammed and Raewf, 2018).

II. IDENTITY

The complicated and flexible nature of identity is the fundamental theme in Patricia Highsmith's novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Tom Ripley, the lead character, is an expert at disguise and imitation, always wrestling with the question of who he is. Throughout the novel, Ripley struggles to identify himself and his place in society, eventually taking on the identity of a friend, Dickie Greenleaf. Highsmith deftly used Ripley's character to explore the complexities of identity and its function in forming a person's sense of self and place in society (Highsmith, 1999). Even as he takes this fake identity, he cannot eliminate the feeling that he is an impostor. This theme is further developed via Ripley's friendship with Dickie, as Ripley grows increasingly resentful of Dickie's affluent existence, driving him to desire to become him.

Ripley's problem with identification is compounded by his incessant attempts to fit in and be accepted by the upper-class society in which he finds himself. Ripley's activities throughout the novel, as shown by Highsmith, might be understood as an attempt to leave his working-class background and win acceptance into the upper-class society that he so admires (Highsmith, 1999). This is visible in the manner in which he dresses, speaks, and behaves, as he attempts to copy the mannerisms and habits of the rich people around him. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes evident that Ripley's attempts to acquire a new identity are unsuccessful since he is incapable of actually becoming someone else. Ripley's fight with identification, according to Highsmith, is eventually useless since he is unable to hide his personality and the guilt that comes with his deeds (Alheli, 2022) This is evident in the

novel's finale when Ripley realizes he will never fully be Dickie Greenleaf and is forced to confront the reality of who he is. The novel's study of the human psyche and its link with the notion of identity has been widely explored into the novel's exploration of the human psyche and its relationship with the concept of identity (Schenkar, 2010).

III. SOCIAL CLASSES

The complicated and pervasive nature of class and social rank is another prominent theme in Patricia Highsmith's novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The novel, set in postwar America in the 1950s, portrays the widespread cultural belief in the American Dream, which stresses upward migration and the capacity to transcend one's socioeconomic station. Highsmith focuses on the intricate dynamics of power and privilege via the characters of Tom Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf. The story depicts how class influences the characters' lives, perceptions, and actions, and how the quest for upward mobility may lead to desperate and ultimately disastrous consequences (Highsmith, 1999), (Mohammed & Raewf, 2018).

Ripley, who is from a working-class family, is envious of Dickie's riches and luxury, but he is also sensitive to the difficulties that come from his heritage. Highsmith demonstrates the complexities of class and how it is not just about money, but also about upper-class habits, etiquette, and attitudes via the character of Ripley (Miller, 2015). According to Highsmith's work, Ripley was unsure of whom he was becoming, but he felt like a guy who had finally discovered what he wanted and that he could have it. This demonstrates how Ripley's ambition to join the upper class is motivated not simply by tangible money but also by the conventions and etiquette that come with it (Schenkar, 2010). Furthermore, the novel explores the concept of class as a restricting aspect of somebody's life. Ripley's actions throughout the novel might be interpreted as an attempt to break free from his working-class roots and win acceptance into the upper-class society that he admires. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that his activities are ineffective, and that he is ultimately bound by his history and the expectations put on him as a result of his class. Highsmith utilizes the environment and the characters in the novel to investigate the theme of class and how it influences the characters' lives. The theme of class is also examined in Ripley and Dickie's relationship, and how it eventually leads to the disintegration of their friendship (Highsmith, 2007). In the novel, Highsmith's writing is a commentary on the social and economic realities of the day, as well as how the class may be a restricting influence in someone's life.

IV. AMERICAN DREAM

The novel masterfully explores the nuances and repercussions of the American Dream, the belief that anybody can attain success and riches through hard work and persistence. Highsmith deftly analyses how this ideal shape the lives, actions, and ambitions of the novel's protagonists, exposing the darker side of the American Dream, moral

ambiguity, and the catastrophic influence it can have on individuals and their relationships. It's a subtle indictment of American culture and its principles, which aren't necessarily matched with individual well-being (Highsmith, 2007).

The American Dream is utilized to investigate the characters' motives, notably the protagonist Tom Ripley, and how they are motivated by their desire for achievement and acceptance (Seijger, 2019). However, the novel eventually depicts the American Dream as a difficult and often deadly road plagued with moral problems, rather than a simple path to pleasure and satisfaction. The character of Tom Ripley is used by Highsmith to show the dark side of the American Dream and how the drive for achievement and acceptability can lead to moral compromise and destructive action (Samuel, 2012). The novel addresses important concerns regarding the nature of the American Dream and its influence on our sense of success and pleasure in this form. The novel also captures postwar America's fears and despair, as well as the disenchantment of the American Dream as a broken promise. Literary critics and American studies experts have also examined this issue, including Adams, who created the phrase in his book "The Epic of America" (Adams and Schneiderman, 2017).

Moreover, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a novel that explores the theme of the American Dream, which is the idea that through hard work and determination, anyone can achieve success and prosperity (Seijger, 2019). The novel portrays that the American Dream is not a straightforward path to happiness and fulfillment, but rather a complex and often perilous journey that is fraught with moral ambiguities. Through the character of Tom Ripley, the novel raises critical questions about the nature of the American Dream and its impact on our understanding of success and happiness (Samuel, 2012).

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a novel that explores complex and thought-provoking themes such as identity, class, and the American Dream. Highsmith's masterful use of these themes creates a gripping and suspenseful story that raises important questions about the nature of human identity and the moral complexities of the modern world (Mohammed & Mustafa, 2022).

The theme of identity is central to the novel, as Ripley's struggles to define himself and his place in the world highlights the ways in which social status and class shape our sense of self. The theme of class is also prominent, as the novel explores how class shapes our aspirations and our sense of self-worth, and how the American Dream can be a trap that can lead to moral ambiguities and destructive behavior. The theme of the American Dream is also central, as the novel shows how the desire for success and acceptance can lead to moral compromise and destructive behavior, raising important questions about the nature of the American Dream and the ways in which it shapes our understanding of success and happiness.

Overall, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a novel that is not just a page-turner but also a thought-provoking exploration of important themes that are still relevant today. Highsmith's

ability to create a suspenseful and gripping story while also delving into the human psyche and the complexities of the modern world makes this novel a classic that continues to be widely read and studied.

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