

# American sociopath – the talented mr ripley essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ Tom glanced behind him and saw the man coming out of the Green Cage, heading his way. Tom walked faster. There was no doubt the man was after him. ” (3). The novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, by Patricia Highsmith, begins by immediately pulling us into the wary and suspicious mind of Tom Ripley.

Highsmith plays the Devil and invites us to identify with every twisted compulsion and trivial resentment gyrating inside the head of a madman. In the film, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, directed by Anthony Minghella, and based on Highsmith's novel, we are able to view another angle in which we are asked to feel pity for an unfortunate murderer. We consider his desires and motivations. Throughout the novel and the film, Tom takes on many different identities. He is not satisfied with himself, and wants to become someone else.

“ I would not call him insane, because his actions are rational. I consider him a rather civilized person who kills when he absolutely has to. If there is not much to be admired about him he is also not entirely to be censured. ”

(Patricia Highsmith). Highsmith's accusations of Tom are not only inaccurate but also absurd.

Tom's true identity is that of a murderous, irrational, and conniving person. Ripley is a man of many faces, talents, and identities. From the beginning he is impersonating an Internal Revenue agent. He tells a few, select individuals that they owe additional money to the government. This shows that Tom is manipulative. Tom's plan is not successful.

Tom finds himself in a struggle for money and sponges off of his friends. He is in search for a new scam and identity at all times. The mysterious man

that follows Tom is Herbert Greenleaf, a wealthy shipbuilder. Greenleaf heard that Tom is acquainted with his son, Dickie, who moved to Italy two years ago as an aspiring painter. Greenleaf's wife is dying of leukemia.

He wants his son back in America, to be with his mother. Tom's memory of Dickie is faint, but he pretends otherwise. Tom always has different intentions in every situation. He must play all circumstances out to the end. Throughout the conversation, while Tom dazzles Greenleaf with fictitious anecdotes, he is actually thinking the complete opposite.

" He was bored, God-damned bloody bored, bored, bored! He wanted to be back at the bar, by himself. " (8). Greenleaf sees only the surface of Tom. Tom appears to be charming, intelligent, and thoughtful. In reality, he is bad and selfish.

Greenleaf asked Tom, " ' Did he ever show you his frame models? Or his drawings? ' Dickie hadn't, but Tom said brightly ' Yes! Of course he did. ' " (8). From the very beginning, Tom shows how he is an imposter. Eventually, Herbert Greenleaf is begging Tom the con artist, to accept an all expense paid trip to Italy. He wants him to visit Dickie and convince the young man to return home.

As soon as Tom arrives in Italy, he begins to use his devious schemes. Upon his arrival in Italy, he bumps into a rich woman named Meredith Logue. From the moment they exchange names, Tom uses Dickie's name and identity. After leaving America in search of a new life, he wastes no time in trying to become someone he does not even know.

This portrays Tom's ability to improvise and think quickly under pressure to become Dickie Greenleaf. After lying to Meredith from his early arrival in Italy, he already shows how he is a cunning person. Tom was a poor man who wanted to be a wealthy man. He was a nobody who wanted not to be famous but simply to be someone else.

Ripley is the typical American in search for the American dream. Ripley's goal in life is to make something of himself, to go from " rags to riches". The color green in this novel is used in many instances to symbolize wealth. " Green Cage" the name of Tom's hangout is a metaphor for wealth and social entrapment. This metaphor for wealth foreshadows Tom's search for another man's identity. Tom will eventually assume the name and identity of Dickie Greenleaf.

The way that Tom goes about attaining this goal is unique. He shows his casual attitude towards murder and shows his lack of a conscience. Through his actions we find that he cannot differentiate between right and wrong. Given a choice, he will pick the most practical decision; morality never enters his reasoning. Some men are envious of other men's fortunes. Ripley demanded their identities.

The novel and film shows him taking control of the life and identity of Dickie Greenleaf. In the film, Matt Damon is bland and ordinary as the character of Tom Ripley, and then takes on the vividness of others, even a jazz singer. Tom desires to become Dickie. Tom Ripley also seems to have feelings for Dickie Greenleaf.

Although egotism and sexuality are so mixed up in his mind, that he almost seems to want to become Dickie, so that he can love himself. This suggestion is never brought up to the level of conscious action. It is always a hidden idea. Many of Tom Ripley's complicated needs and desires are unknown and secretive. This is until he decides what he wants to do, by doing it.

Self-hating and ashamed, he stumbles about in his desire for Dickie. Ripley doesn't merely want to possess the object of his affection he wants to be him. If Dickie were to inhabit his body then he would be somebody in the literal sense, perhaps for the first time. Dickie has everything a young man should, a great girlfriend, money, and talent. Only Dickie does not realize how rare these advantages are. Is Tom's attraction towards Dickie and his identity more than just social jealousy? Orphaned as a child and reared by an oppressive aunt, self-loathing Tom admires others who appear confident and sophisticated.

Tom is taken with the life and looks of Dickie Greenleaf. He places himself into Dickie's world and soon finds that his passion for a lifestyle of wealth and complexity exceed everything he has ever experienced. When Dickie turns out to be arrogant and irritable, Tom develops a plan to reinvent himself as a new and improved adaptation of Dickie. In the scene when Dickie catches Tom wearing his clothes is the awkward moment that ultimately leads to the murder of Dickie. Dickie begins to detach himself from Tom.

This disengagement from the friendship crushes Tom's obsessive affection and at the same time raises his considerable anger. Dickie begins to spend more time with Freddy and this angers Tom. This builds jealousy towards Freddy inside of Tom. Eventually this angers Tom so much that he resorts to drastic measures. Tom will become Dickie Greenleaf, at all costs.

The film does not quite know from what angle to view its mysterious and devious main character. For all intents and purposes, Tom Ripley is a sociopath, and at times the movie seems to be condemning him as such. However, an equally presented viewpoint seems to justify his evil deed. The film seems to be saying, that he may be evil, but given the circumstances, wouldn't anyone be? The film dares you to side with a character that does many immoral things. Tom Ripley seduces the reader to sympathize with him even as his actions defy all moral standards. He makes the reader believe that he murders simply because he has no other option.

Highsmith makes Ripley so ordinary and likeable that the reader is constantly drawn back to his logic. Tom pulls us into loneliness and causes us to feel pity for him. Not only does Tom manipulate the characters in the book, but also he does the same to the reader. In the quote from Highsmith, she tries to rationalize Ripley's actions.

Murder is not a sane way of dealing with problems. Through murder alone we could find that Tom is an insane and vicious person. Tom shows no sign of having a conscience or the ability to make reasonable decisions. When he dislikes someone, he thinks the only rational way to deal with it, is murder. Tom's inability to make moral decisions shows his incapability of being a

normal human being. Tom does not hesitate when he decides to murder his victims, simply because he does not feel it is wrong.

When Highsmith tries to say that Tom does indeed act in a “rational” manner, it is far from reality and the truth. In the novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, by Patricia Highsmith, Tom plays a homosexual homicidal maniac. His decisions and actions are reckless and psychotic.

The author and film, successfully make the reader sympathize with Tom even though he destroys lives. His unhappiness, leads him to search and adopt other identities. Unfortunately, he will never truly be content because he can never be another person. His misery will always linger in any identity or role that he takes on.