

# Deception and identity in othello and the talented mr ripley



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Identity is crucial in understanding our values and morals and is shaped by societal expectations and the choices we make. Thus, it is ultimately an individual's choice to relinquish temptations of deception, in which often eventuates to the corruption of an individual's moral framework. Identity and deception are interrelated concepts that are evident in *Othello*, composed by William Shakespeare, and *The Talented Mr Ripley*, directed by Anthony Minghella. Therefore, a deeper understanding of deception and identity emerges from considering the parallels between the texts.

The social concerns of a society can ultimately impact upon an individual's identity. The principal social concern during the Elizabethan era was the introduction of 'blacks' into the predominantly white society. To convey these concerns, Shakespeare deliberately positions the protagonist as an outsider. Othello is a well-respected general with a strong identity; however, his success is constantly undermined through racial rejection. This is particularly evident in Iago's racist and animal-based epithets about Othello, such as "the old black ram" in which creates imagery of the devil and creates the perception that Othello is in conflict with his own identity. "Far more fair than black" explores that this conflict has eventuated from his acceptance in society due to his strong moral framework, yet his rejection due to his race. Therefore, by positioning Othello as an outsider, the audience can understand and appreciate the depth of racism and its impact on Othello's identity.

Both Othello and Tom are individuals that have experienced rejection in a world that was undergoing a turbulent social upheaval. Throughout the 1950s, there were distinguished social classes, and teenagers began

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rejecting the traditional values. Similarly to Othello, in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, the composer deliberately positions the protagonist, Tom, as a marginalized outsider. This is represented in the scene where Tom performs a piano sonata, alone, in the dark, in the theatre. The long camera shot emphasizes his isolation. When Tom is caught, he immediately stops playing as he is aware that his identity presents an insignificant worker. Thus, through examining the parallels between the texts, both Tom and Othello are positioned as marginalized outsiders to result in a deeper understanding of how societal expectations can impact and conflict with an individual's identity.

Deception is often used to manipulate and acquire power in which an individual may not be entitled to. Iago consciously uses methods of deception for achieving his ambitions to acquire a higher social position, in which comes in conflict with the Elizabethan societal expectations. "Make the net, that shall enmesh them all... I am not what I am." Iago's ambition to establish a deceptive identity was revealed in this excerpt in his soliloquy. The accumulation of the imagery of 'nets' conjures images of Iago's manipulative plans. The paradoxical excerpt substantiates Iago's fake identity and contradicts the repetitive references of "honest Iago". Thus, the juxtaposition creates dramatic irony and suggests that a lack of morals is required to operate the complex levels of deception. Therefore, Iago manipulates power to establish a deceptive identity, in order to achieve his ambition in which conflicts with societal expectations.

Similarly, in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, Tom uses deception to achieve his ambitions in which challenges the emerging societal values. "I always  
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thought it would be better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody.”

Dicky’s materialistic identity was a representation of the identity that Tom was not entitled to and thus, it was Tom’s ambition to fake Dicky’s identity. The dialogue and the sorrowful tone indicates Tom’s agitated mind. Tom’s deception was established through an accident; however, it eventuated into deliberate deceptive choices in which guided him to material gain, yet also corrupted his moral framework. Two striking contrasts between Iago and Tom, is that Iago is deceptive from the opening of the play and Iago manipulates people by “ enmeshing them all”. Therefore, through the examination of the texts, a deeper understanding emerges about the establishment of deceptive identities to achieve an individual’s ambition.

Self-deception is the process of believing misleading information about ourselves. Self-deception is particularly evident in the way Othello perceives himself after the murder. “ That’s he that was Othello; here I am.” Othello refers to himself in the third person to indicate that he has lost and corrupted his moral framework and identity. To justify his actions of murder to himself, he uses the expression “ it was cause, it was the cause, my soul”, as he cannot bear the consequences of his dishonorable actions. To assist with this and to also persuade the other characters, he uses high modality language, to justify that it was his ‘ honorable’ duty and responsibility to murder his whore wife. Therefore, it is through self-deception that Othello deceives and corrupts his moral framework.

Self-deception is also evident in the character of Tom Ripley. “ Don’t you just take the past and put it in a room in the basement, and lock the door and just never go in there? That’s what I do.” Tom expresses the notion of <https://assignbuster.com/deception-identity-in-othello-and-the-talented-mr-ripley/>

isolating the past as a method of protecting his deceptive actions from consuming his fake identity. This also reveals his sociopathic behavior. The use of the close-up camera shot of Tom's face in conjunction with the diegetic music, a grave and sorrowful piece, suggests that Tom's sense of unreality has eventuated to the acceptance of his deceptive deeds. This is similar to when Othello refers to himself in the third person in which indicates the recognition of the corruption of his identity. Therefore, through examining the parallels, both Othello and Tom use self-deception as a way for Tom, to forget, or for Othello, to justify his actions.

In conclusion, a deeper understanding of the interrelated concepts, deception and identity, emerges from considering the parallels between the two texts, Othello and The Talented Mr Ripley. Othello and Tom are positioned as outsiders to convey the rejection of those who do not abide by social expectations. Iago and Tom use deception as a means of manipulating power in order to gain a falsified identity.