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## Lolita And The Talented Mr. Ripley: The Dangers Of Obsession

The term obsession is frequently used in common language to show that one is very interested in a person, place or thing. For example, one may say they are obsessed with a certain TV show. However, the true definition of obsession is a thought that constantly consumes or interferes with a person's mind. This type of obsession frequently leads a person to act compulsively towards the object of their affection. The obsessed person will lose all control and perspective of their feelings. The novels *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Lolita* are both written about severe cases of this obsession. The main characters in each novel, Tom Ripley and Humbert, are both so consumed by their feelings of obsession are driven to commit crimes. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom Ripley is approached by Mr. Greenleaf and asked if he will travel to Europe in order to convince his son, Dickie Greenleaf, to return home. As Mr. Greenleaf proposes he will pay for his travels, Tom is thrilled to take this trip and leave his life behind. When Tom arrives in Europe, he quickly befriends Dickie and starts living with him. Tom quickly develops deep feelings for Dickie, and takes a dislike Dickie's close friend Marge, as he believes she is in the way of their relationship. Unfortunately, Dickie does not reciprocate Tom's feelings, and this triggers Tom to murder Dickie. The author, Patricia Highsmith, points out how Tom became obsessed with Dickie as he would mimic his movements, tried on Dickie's clothes and wanted to spend every minute with him. In the novel *Lolita*, the narrator Humbert writes a memoir in order to make people sympathise for him even though he is a paedophile. When Humbert was a young boy, he fell in love with a girl named Annabelle. She died 4 months later which severely traumatized Humbert who then searched for someone similar to Annabelle to try and heal his wound. He sought out young girls, between the ages of nine and fourteen, whom he called nymphets. Humbert believed nymphets knowingly tempted older men. He stumbled upon Dolores Haze with whom he ended up in an illegal sexual relationship with, despite her being only twelve years old. Though Humbert says he loves Dolores, this is an obsessive love as he controls her, watches her and deprives her of freedom. At first, he simply observed Dolores and watched everything she did, but he soon gave in. The novels *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Lolita* both have main characters who become very fixated on another person leading to inappropriate behaviour including excessive jealousy, delusional thoughts and an unstable personal identity.

In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, as Tom's feelings grow for Dickie and their relationship deepens, he becomes very jealous over Marge and Dickie's relationship. At one-point, Dickie leaves Tom to go to Marge's house. Soon afterwards Tom follows him and sees the pair kissing. This causes anger and frustration in Tom, as all he wants is for Dickie to care for him instead. Tom retreats home and re-enacts this scene with the ending he wants, rather than the real one. "Marge, you must understand that I don't love you," Tom said into the mirror in Dickie's voice... "Marge, stop it!" Tom turned suddenly and made a grab in the air as if he were seizing Marge's throat. He shook her, twisted her, while she sank lower and lower, until at last he left her, limp, on the floor." (Highsmith 78). Tom is so upset with what he saw, he does not know how to act and decides to dress up in Dickie's clothes. Tom's growing obsession over Dickie Greenleaf creates his extreme jealousy. Tom wants to Dickie all to himself and to spend as much time possible with him. This cannot happen, as Dickie does not feel the same way. Also, it is an unreasonable expectation to have someone all to oneself and want them to care for no

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one else. Tom believes it is Marge's fault that he cannot have Dickie to himself and that she needs to be removed from the equation. Anthony Hilfer wrote the critical essay, 'Not Really Such a Monster': Highsmith's Ripley as Thriller Protagonist and Protean Man. In this essay, he addresses the fact that the reason Tom and Dickie had a falling out was because of Tom's jealousy, "...when he arrives in Italy, he finds it more appealing to insinuate himself into Dickie's enjoyable lifestyle than to persuade him to renounce it. The spanner gets into the works when Dickie falls out with Tom due to Tom's jealousy of Dickie's girl friend, Marge." (Hilfer). Tom Ripley becomes very captivated over Dickie and this leads to his controlling and jealous behaviour.

Not only is jealousy seen in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, but it is also in the novel *Lolita*. The protagonist, Humbert Humbert, deceives his way into being Dolores Haze's stepfather and believes this gave him much power over her. His intense love for her also brought along great jealousy. After the death of Dolores's mother, Humbert takes Dolores out of her summer camp and decides they will travel across the United States together. During this time, Dolores is barely allowed any freedom while on their road trip because of Humbert's controlling and jealous behaviour. "Absolutely forbidden were dates, single or double or triple – the next step being of course mass orgy. She might visit a candy bar with her girl friends, and there, giggle-chat with occasional young males, while I waited in the car at a discreet distance." (Nabokov 169-170). Not only does Humbert mention how he spies on Dolores when she speaks to a boy, but it becomes even more extreme to the point where Humbert explains how he must hear all of her conversations, "...she would never, never be permitted to go with a youngster in rut to a movie, or neck in a car, or go to boy-girl parties at the house of schoolmates, or indulge out of my earshot in boy-girl telephone conversations..." (Nabokov 170). These prove that Humbert has an excessive amount of jealousy when it comes to a boy being around Dolores. In the critical essay titled, *Dolores Disparue*, David Jones mentions, "The narrative pattern in both books might be outlined so: jealousy, incarceration, alternating submission and revolt, and flight. ...Humbert Humbert isolates Lolita in an endless chain of motels." (Jones). Though Humbert says he loves her; it is not true love, but an obsessive and restraining love. In *Dolores Disparue*, the author analyzes how Humbert Humbert's jealousy leads him to keep her isolated from others.

In the novel *Lolita*, the main character Humbert Humbert becomes very delusional from his fixation on the young Dolores Haze. Delusional thinking is defined as having a very strong belief though the evidence shows the belief is false. This is seen in this novel when Humbert refers to the twelve-year-old girl he is in love with as Lolita, though her real name is Dolores Haze. Humbert is so fixated on her, that he believes she is his possession and his creation. "She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms, she was always Lolita." (Nabokov 11). Instead of seeing her as the little girl Dolores Haze, he sees her as the nymphet Lolita. The critical essay by Kirsten Rutsala mentions, "Humbert has invented a magical nymphet who has no separate existence outside his imagination, just as he has created a special name for her that only he has the privilege of using. While he may believe his words celebrate the existence of the real Dolores Haze, it becomes increasingly clear that he is chasing a fantasy that never really existed." (Rutsala). Humbert believes that Lolita is his though she is just a little girl who never had a father figure. Overall, one can clearly see that this belief is all in his head. From Humbert's obsession of Lolita, he becomes delusional of what their relationship really is.

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While Humbert Humbert faces delusion in *Lolita*, Tom Ripley also experiences it in the novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. This can be seen when Patricia Highsmith writes of Tom's thoughts, "The Dickie-Marge relationship was evidently just what he had supposed it to be at first. Tom thought Marge was much fonder of Dickie than Dickie was of her." (Highsmith 71). This is an example of self delusion that Tom faces because he cannot see or understand how another person feels. He can only understand his own emotions and he projects those as someone else's. This is evident when Tom believes that Dickie does not love or want to be with Marge. Tom does not know this for a fact, he just thinks this is the case. This is an example of delusion because Tom convinces himself that this is true even when he cannot say for sure. Another case of Tom's self delusion is shown after Tom has murdered Dickie and consumed his identity. Tom tries to convince himself that the police's suspicions of Dickie have blown over. This is something that Tom could not know as he is not a police officer and has no inside information to prove this. "...there had been nothing of any interest in the papers about the Miles case and nothing at all about the San Remo boat, and the police had made no attempt to reach him that he knew of." (Highsmith 178). After he committed both murders, Tom continuously buys newspapers in order to check if the police are looking for him. This is delusion because he is constantly attempting to reassure himself, he is not being investigated. Also, he believes this just because there are not police officers everywhere. Overall his obsession of Dickie Greenleaf has led to many cases of delusion, from when Dickie was alive till even after he is dead.

In the novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the main character is portrayed as someone with no fundamental identity to rely on. He craves attention and approval from Dickie. However, when he does not give this, Tom goes to drastic measures to try to get rid of that trauma. It is also implied that Tom Ripley may be homosexual. When Dickie comes back from Marge's house, he catches Tom trying on his clothes, and mentions to Tom that he is not homosexual. Once this is said, Tom immediately reassures Dickie that he is not either. "'Well, Marge thinks you are.' 'Why?' Tom felt the blood go out of his face... He felt faint. Nobody had ever said it outright to him, not in this way... 'Dickie, I want to get this straight,' Tom began. 'I'm not queer either, and I don't want anybody thinking I am.'" (Highsmith). Eric Targan is the author of, *Identity Theft: The Amoral Vision of Patricia Highsmith*. In this critical essay, after mentioning the fact that Marge thinks Ripley is homosexual, he says, "This is an example of 'mistaken identity,' but the mistake is Ripley's, not Marge's. She sees his true nature better than he can see it himself. In a sense, this is also a part of the shattering of identity mentioned earlier; we go through life wanting to be perceived in a certain way, but often others peer through our façade and see us the way we really are, the way we do not wish to be seen." (Targan). Tom Ripley is seen as who he may truly be, but someone he will not admit he is. This pushes him to kill Dickie as he does not feel the same way.

The issue of identity can also be seen in the novel *Lolita* when Humbert tries to find his own American identity. However, when this is not individualistic enough, he goes outside of the norms of society. Humbert Humbert is a paedophile and murderer who justifies his actions because he loves Lolita. Humbert has a firm sense of identity despite societal expectations and social norms. Humbert was traumatized from the death of his love Annabelle when he was just a young boy, which leads to his obsession of young girls, as all he wanted was someone like his first love. This obsession led to his unstable and deranged identity. In the novel, part one ends with the results of Humbert telling Lolita her mother was dead. "At the hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go." (Nabokov 142). He believes she had nowhere else to go, when in reality she goes to him because she has just started to mourn the

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death of her mother. Kirsten Rutsala mentions in her critical essay, "...the words encapsulate the narrator's calculated awareness and exploitation of this dependence, a kind of thrilled satisfaction, half disguised by a chummy, folksy tone that invites the reader's complicity. In these laconic sentences, the full horror of the situation for Lolita is brought home to the reader, the dependence that is ultimately indistinguishable from captivity." (Rutsala). Humbert's identity includes complete awareness of all his actions and the reasons they are wrong. From this critical essay, it is explained that Humbert exploits his relationship with Lolita and should not have any sympathy though he begs for it. Overall, Humbert's identity became this way because of his captivation for Lolita.

Authors Nabokov and Highsmith both create protagonists that are driven by obsession. This powerful emotion not only changes the way someone thinks and make them worry and exaggerate more, but it also changes one's behaviour. This is seen in the novels *Lolita* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* when Tom Ripley and Humbert Humbert face extreme jealousy, delusional behaviour and struggles with their identity. All of this occurs because they become so captivated over their soon to be victims. Not only are both of these characters criminals, but the authors make them out to be the good guys.?