

Masquerading Identities *In The Talented Mr. Ripley* And *Crossing*: Trauma, Deconstruction And
Performance

By

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requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma from a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tirana Ibrat', written in a stylized, cursive script.

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Approval

The thesis titled “Masquerading Identities In *The Talented Mr. Ripley* And *Crossing*: Trauma, Deconstruction And Performance” by Tirana Ibrat (21303033) of Spring 2024 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English.

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Dedications

To the old me, the one who lived.

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Abstract

Masquerading, the disguise of impersonation, offers the unique dimensions of concealing, revealing and reforming identity. This thesis analyses the compelling portrayal of masquerade in light of the novels *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) and *Crossing* (2016), where the characters Ripley and Bujar put on metaphysical masks to perform as their desired personas. Although this phenomenon seems like a mere act of deceit, the complexities of the masquerade have an underlying cause. By taking a deep dive into the characters' minds, this research investigates the impact of trauma using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, and how it causes deconstruction of self. As a result, they resort to masking and mimicry, serving masquerade as a coping mechanism and reinvention of identity. Additionally, this thesis employs Goffman's performance module and Butler's gender performativity to demonstrate how the characters perform in everyday life as queer individuals. The thesis further examines how the conscious and nonconscious mimicry of performances, viewed through the psychological lens of the chameleon effect, shape the way these deviants negotiate their shifting identities.

Keywords: Masquerade, Masks, Identity, Self, Trauma, Deconstruction, Performance, Gender, Queer, Reform, Reveal, Disguise, Mimicry, Chameleon.

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“This vessel, this vessel is a lie, a shapeshifting beast, a lesson in fluidity.” (Lux)

Introduction

At a masquerade ball, participants wear masks before their performance, hiding their true identities beneath them. Masking is the act of disguising oneself, while masquerading is the act of impersonation, pretending to adopt a completely different identity. The term masquerade, referred to in Efrat Tseëlon’s study, where she explores themes of masking and identity, as well as how the performance of masquerade is a process of constructing and deconstructing the self. The focus of masquerading introduces questions about masking and what might reveal about identity. Identity is not something a person has; rather, it is what a person does, an ongoing process. When a person’s identity is fragmented from past trauma, the desire to masquerade as someone else becomes a driving force as they navigate through different identities and masks. However, the masquerade challenges the notions of the “real self” behind these masks, as it can be used to conceal and reveal aspects of one’s identity. In this regard, a masquerade can be described as a double-edged tool that has the ability to liberate and restrict, expose and obscure. The compelling portrayal of masquerading can be recognised in the novels *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) by Patricia Highsmith and Pajtim Statovci’s *Crossing* (2016). Both stories depict the interplay between masquerade and identity, trauma and fragmented self, and how the main characters adopt different identities by mimicking and performing their desired roles.

Published in 1955 and subsequently winning the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Novel of 1956, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is considered to be Patricia Highsmith’s best creation. Although the novel is often labelled as crime fiction, its heart lies in the complex psychological

presentation of Tom Ripley. Highsmith composes Tom Ripley's character with his greatest 'talent' of replicating and impersonating others. This talent extends beyond the first novel, as the protagonist appears in four subsequent novels. If it isn't evidently clear how Highsmith advocates for Ripley already, she further admits, "I think Ripley himself should have received [The Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allen Poe Award]. No book was easier for me to write, and I often had the feeling Ripley was writing it and I was merely typing" (Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction 69). Thomas P. Ripley is an outlet for Mary P. Highsmith's inner deviant to play out in ink, a character that fascinates the readers with his cunning and enigmatic personality. Owing to its immense popularity, the novel has several film and series adaptations, such as *Purple Noon* (1960), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1991) and *Ripley* (2024). Patricia Highsmith (1921-1995) spent the majority of her life as a European expatriate, which can be recognised while reading her works. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* starts by introducing Tom, a con artist trying to survive in New York, by means including committing tax fraud and miscellaneous jobs. He tricks others by pretending to be someone else to obtain money and lives his life like a social outcast. Having lost his parents at a young age, he had to endure the taunts of his Aunt Dottie, which made him incapable of making human connections. Bound by poverty and childhood trauma, his life is in a state of stagnation. It takes a swift turn when he encounters Herbert Greenleaf, a wealthy owner of a ship company, who offers Tom an all-expenses trip to Italy, just to persuade his son Richard Greenleaf to return to America. Upon arriving in a town named 'Mongibello', Tom immediately recognises Dickie and his friend Marge from the family photos Mr Greenleaf had shown him, and tries to befriend them. At first, Dickie is sceptical, but when Tom divulges that he's travelling on his father's expenses, Dickie and Tom team up to use all the money. They become friends, and although Highsmith never makes it explicit, Tom's

infatuation with Dickie is beyond friendship. He pays close attention to every movement Dickie makes, consciously and unconsciously mimicking them. This admiration soon morphs into possessiveness, even going so far as to put on Dickie's clothes and pretend to reject Marge in front of a mirror. Dickie catches him red-handed in the act, questioning his sexuality and putting a distance between them. The rejection is unbearable for Tom, as his desire for Dickie turns into hatred. On their last trip to San Remo, Tom decides to take the drastic measure of murdering Dickie and claiming his identity, as both men had similar features. When they are finally on a boat together, away from anyone in sight, Tom uses the oar to strike Dickie countless times before tossing the body overboard in the sea. After the murder, Tom now assumes Dickie's identity, altering his appearance like Dickie's and forging his signature to travel all across Italy under his name. He shuttles between the two identities effortlessly, like a chameleon, adopting Dickie's mannerisms, accents and even confidence. Through this impersonation, Tom is able to express himself in a way he never could before, a mixture of freedom and confinement. However, Dickie's friend Freddie Miles finds out about his appropriation, so he kills Freddie too. He narrowly escapes the police a few times and has had instances where he was nearly found, but manages to maintain his masquerade till the end.

Originally published in Finnish with the title *Tiranan Sydän* ("Heart of Tirana"), Pajtim Statovci's *Crossing* unravels an existentially and emotionally complex narrative of Bujar, a young man who grapples with his identities and migration. Translated by David Hackston, in English in 2019, the novel won the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize in the same year. Born in exile himself, the Finnish-Kosovan author imbues his experiences through Bujar's character. The non-linear narrative unfolds themes beyond migration and youthful revolt, as it demonstrates trauma, identity crisis, gender expression and alienation. In every city Bujar goes, he adopts a

new identity, changing his gender and biography as he pleases, with the exception of one: his past identity as Bujar, an Albanian, whose childhood is stained in disaster. One of the narrative timelines the story follows dates back to 1990, in Albania, where Bujar's home city, Tirana, is in socio-political ruin. Poverty and corruption are often at play, as the nation suffers a post-communist climate after the death of Enver Hoxha. Bujar goes through several hardships, including the death of his father, the disappearance of his sister, the detachment of his mother, and sexual assault by his employer. Despite his misfortune, he endures everything, knowing he has Agim, his best friend and the person he loves. Agim is confident, intelligent and challenges back-dated views of patriarchy and heteronormal society, something Bujar doesn't have the courage to express. Agim is also unapologetically transgender, a girl in a boy's body, with whom Bujar shares a semi-erotic relationship after denying being homosexual. As post-communist Albania faces societal collapse in every way, from slavery to prostitution and organ harvesting, the two boys struggle with the reality they are living, so they run away from their homes and decide to leave Albania. Their attempt to migrate takes them onto a boat in the middle of the night, where an accident leads Bujar to push Agim overboard, bringing about their untimely death. Agim's death leaves a severe wound in Bujar's psyche, as he loses the sense of his own self and resorts to masking as different identities. In Germany dresses up as a woman from Bosnia named Ariana, in Spain, he is a man in a relationship with a woman named Rosa, where he sometimes puts on his lover's dress in secrecy. Once he moves to New York, Bujar claims that he has acted in small productions throughout Europe. Wherever he goes, he changes his gender and national identity, challenging the traditional views in society. He moves to Finland and lives a dual life, one as himself and the other as Tanja, his transgender lover whose identity he adopts. After getting rejected in a music competition, dressing up as Tanja, Bujar breaks up with the real

Tanja, which leads to her suicide. The novel ends with Bujar returning to Albania, as Bujar himself, finally looking back on his past and acknowledging his fractured identity.

Although the characters and their tales in each novel are unique as they go through different experiences, there are some common grounds that both tread across. Trauma is one of the similarities that shape their psyche. Both characters endure traumatic experiences, which lead them to have fragmented narratives and fractured identities. The past haunts them through a series of flashbacks, and they feel extreme hatred towards themselves. As a result, they feel inclined to take on other people's identities and wear them as their own. This phenomenon of masquerading is found in both novels, as Tom assumes Dickie's identity and Bujar adopts several different masks and performs accordingly. The identities they assume become a performance, as they proceed to present themselves to the world as someone else. At one point, the line between the self and the mask becomes blurred, a paradox found in these two characters as they navigate these performances. Another similarity between Tom Ripley and Bujar can be observed, which is the fact that both are queer individuals who experience internal conflicts and struggle to accept the deviant side of themselves. Research on these connections between the novels remains to be seen. This research, therefore, aims to analyse the portrayal of masquerading in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*, and how masquerading serves as a coping mechanism and tool for reforming identity. Delving into the roots of the character's psyche, this thesis also applies Cathy Caruth's trauma theory to understand the adverse effects of trauma that lead to the deconstruction of the self. Additionally, Ervin Goffman's theory of performance will be incorporated to investigate their performative identities while employing the chameleon effect to compare the conscious and nonconscious mimicry they do during these

performances. Furthermore, this thesis also highlights the marginalised queer identities of Tom and Bujar in light of Judith Butler's gender performativity. Finally, evaluating these theoretical lenses through the close reading of the primary texts, this study offers a discussion of the consequences of their masked identities.

Research Questions

By analysing the primary texts *Crossing* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and incorporating theoretical frameworks such as trauma, identity loss, masquerading and performative self, this thesis strives to answer the following questions:

1. How does trauma, specifically in Cathy Caruth's definition, manifest in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*? In what ways does trauma deconstruct the concept of self and identity for both Ripley and Bujar?
2. How do they use masquerade as a coping mechanism for trauma and the reshaping of identity? How does the masquerade conceal and reveal aspects of their identity?
3. What are the performative roles these characters play in relation to gender and sexuality that conforms to their marginalised queer identities? What parallels and disparities surface when the novels are examined through the lenses of trauma, masking and performative self?

Literature Review & Research Gap

The following literature review comprises a collection of secondary sources relevant to my thesis topic and prior research on either of the primary texts that support the core ideas. Numerous research studies have been conducted on both *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*—one being more recognised and preceding than the other—yet very few have explored themes such as masquerading or performative identity, as well as the characters’ trauma and the navigating forces of their psyche. Several have touched on these topics on a surface level, but the lack of in-depth exploration is why this thesis plays a significant role in filling the gap. Evaluating scholarly papers done on Highsmith and Statovci’s works, most have exclusively looked into themes such as queer identities, migration and displacement, isolation, trauma, yet no other studies have put these two novels together, much less in parallels, through combined theoretical lenses like Tseëlon’s masquerading, Caruth’s trauma theory and identity loss as well as Goffman’s idea of performative identity and Judith Butler’s gender performativity. Rather than having a straightforward and generalised categorisation, this paper aims to capture the true essence of Statovci and Highsmith’s characters. As Todd Decker mentions that critics have an affinity to label *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as either a crime-thriller or a queer novel, when in actuality, “it is – of course – both” (Decker 186). Similarly, with *Crossing*, due to the text having a niche audience and being relatively contemporary, very few scholars have yet to find its true potential.

A tool for construction and a tool for critique, Tseëlon offers a multifaceted approach of literal and metaphorical masquerade. Her book is an integrative appraisal that includes a series of

scholarly essays and ideas on the broad spectrum of identity and sexuality, concerning masks and masking. Each essay ranges over varying aspects of masking, uniting in their emphasis on the significance of the masquerade in relation to one's identity. Contents in her research include masks in carnivals, stigma of illegitimacy, inanimate masks as masquerade, marginalised identities and the voice behind the mask. Tseëlon argues the distinction between the 'real' self and the mask, whether the mask is a personal prison or a protection from external forces. The goal of her research is to redefine masquerade as an analytical category for interrogating identity and power. This thesis, in accordance with Tseëlon's formation of masquerade, will explore *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing* and observe the masquerading that takes on both Ripley's and Bujar's identities. She also suggests there is no true or 'real' identity behind a mask, that the mask at some point becomes a part of a person's identity rather than a means of concealment. She offers a new perspective on masking, claiming that masquerade is a statement about the wearer. The core essence of masquerading, as Tseëlon postulates, is the art of disguise, while simultaneously it sheds light on the fundamental issues as the nature and truth of identity, the stability or instability of identity categories and the relationship between supposed identity and its outward manifestations. Building on these nuances of essence vs appearance, the text uses masquerade as identity construction and as identity critique through a range of styles and narrative forms (Tseëlon 3). While Tseëlon endorses her notions of self and identity, the collection does not provide a clear closure of the masquerade's purpose, but offers an open-ended narration for the sake of its fluid nature. This thesis will accommodate similar discussions of Tseëlon's masquerading found in both Ripley's and Bujar's lifestyles, as both characters use masking not only to disguise but redefine their identities. Between evasiveness and disguise, Davies seems to emphasise the concealing nature of masking, that it is a veil used to hide

something that is otherwise considered forbidden. She borrows Goffman's idea of 'discreditable' stigma and challenges it, stating that certain groups of people wear masks because of the stigma surrounding them. It is 'illegitimates and homosexuals' or the marginalised people that Davies is alluding to. She upholds the idea that 'the homosexuals' is their real and essential identity, which has been disguised in a number of ways throughout the history of early modern Europe. This is severely tied to the stigma and infamy about them. She refers to them as 'illegitimates' as they are considered social outcasts for their sexual orientation, class or even race, not belonging to the norms of society. Attesting to Davies' argument, this thesis will draw connections with the two novels, as Tom Ripley and Bujar fall into the category of 'the homosexuals and illegimates', and the stigma impels them to wear masks to hide their sexuality.

According to Eliade, masks are an outlet for otherness. In fact, they embody not only the archetypal Other but also its opposite and the potential for transcending it. It is a stranger in modernity where people are prone to assimilate, as it has several fundamentally affecting characteristics at play: to defy order and forgo commitment, suggesting ambiguity and the dubious nature of both belonging and not belonging. Eliade's approach to masks takes on a more transcendent and mythical route, which does not align with the themes of this research; however, the angle where masking serves as a way to acquaint otherness and the representation of the Other is shed light through Bujar and Ripley.

Subsequently, Goffman's perspective of the performative self and its presentation in everyday life is employed in this research. He suggests that life is a theatre, where all of us are performers who participate in everyday interactions. This performance is tailored to fit in the setting, socio-economic environment, as well as the people that come in contact with us, either

discreet or superlative. The blurred line between the real and rehearsed takes place once the performers go out into the world, as they appeal to their audiences. Goffman's theory is significant for this research because it justifies the performative roles that Bujar and Ripley take on and the desire to appear in a certain way in front of people. He introduces the concept of "front" and "back" stages, dramatisation and the split between performances—the front being the external environment and surroundings, whereas the back is the intimate and personal space, where people take off their masks. The front is grounds for assimilation and maintaining social and interpersonal identity, which Goffman elucidates as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (22). To put up a convincing front, the actor fulfils the responsibilities of social roles designated for them and commits to that specific role for social acceptance. Meanwhile, backstage, there is a disparity and tension that arises with familiarity, a contrast between what is presented or acted out in front. This portrayal can be drawn in Highsmith and Statovci's dimensions, as the thesis will demonstrate at length. It is not always a deliberate action to perform, as sometimes the performers put out their fronts instinctively. Goffman gives the example of a doctor who, knowing full well that a placebo is ineffective, feels compelled to administer it to a patient because the patient wants more intensive therapy (18). The persona or identity is thus formed as a result of interactions with others, exchanging information, even if it is hidden truths. Performances are chiefly relevant to their setting. Goffman proposes that there is expressive equipment that navigates where the performer goes, meaning the roles are influenced by where both the mental and physical 'stage' is. Goffman also prioritises the motives of these performances by categorising the performers as sincere and cynical. The former are people who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance, as though the persona they created

embodies who they are. Alternatively, the cynical are the performers who are aimless; they have no strict belief about themselves, nor do they care about the impression they leave on their audiences. Goffman's theory expands on the levels of everyday performance which this thesis exemplifies through Bujar and Ripley's experiences.

Butler also canvases the performative nature of identity, particularly gender performativity, in several of their discourses. They cohere with the idea that one's gender is not being in a part of a performance but a performance in itself. Butler views that if gender is a social construct, it is not gender that is being constructed by people, but people are instead the ones who are being constructed. To Butler, gender is not inherent, but performative and "is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler 527). This indicates that nobody is a gender before doing gendered acts. This notion redefines a person's identity, as they claim that identity can be ensured through the stabilising social concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality. Performative gender equates to performative identity, as they explain that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (33). Building on Butler's research, this paper will take notes on gender performance and apply it to the primary texts. Although the main focus of this thesis is not the characters' genders, a key component of their identities is their performative gender and the gender roles that are adopted to either conceal or restrict the inner self. Especially in the character Bujar, who embodies Butler's proposition that gender is a performance and dependent on gender expressions, as he takes on different gender roles and gender identities.

Cathy Caruth postulates the narratives of trauma and how it impacts the human psyche. In her works, she has been auspicious in elucidating the manifestations of trauma, which will be thoroughly employed in this research. Caruth reinvents the definition of trauma by describing trauma as the “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events”, which is often responded to in a delayed and repetitive series of hallucinations. It is not immediately processed or understood, but rather recurs in waves that continuously impact the person's life, often in an unpredictable manner. Her concept highlights the "delayed" nature of trauma, which appears as a shock and is later recognised as painful rather than being immediately integrated into the person's experience. According to Caruth, trauma is rarely fully acknowledged at the time of its occurrence and is instead understood via its repeated repetition. This intrusive phenomenon can be traced through Highsmith and Statovci's novels, where both characters suffer the aftereffects of trauma much later than the events transpired. The main goal of Caruth's book is not to present case studies of trauma survivors in terms of psychopathy, but to examine and explain the profound stories of traumatic experiences using literary theory, psychoanalysis, and literature as frameworks. Among numerous other trauma theories, this research favours Caruth's research in order to intricately understand the language of trauma and its literacy in the primary novels. Furthermore, Caruth's theory interacts with the relationship between history and trauma, and that, besides a psychological condition, the traumatised become “the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess and thus which possesses them” (Caruth, 34). Moreover, she elaborates on how trauma impairs the ability to comprehend one's experiences in real-time, which in turn manifests in disjointed narratives. As a result, these fragmented narratives don't let trauma remain in the ‘past’, but trauma persists in language, culture and daily lives as an ‘unclaimed’ state. The language of trauma is offset through fragmented memories, gaps, silences,

recurrent dreams, and constant flashbacks of the dreadful events. Bujar experiences these symptoms as they are depicted throughout the novel, portrayed through recurring dreams of Agim and the hallucinations of a 'horse' he encounters, as well as the novel's fragmented narrative style. The "ghostly" continuation of trauma across generations can be seen in the light of marginalised people, as Caruth posits that unresolved trauma lingers over generations like a spectre. Both Bujar and Ripley are marginalised queer men who have generational trauma passed over to them through childhood neglect and abuse. Caruth also pays attention to the concept of trauma as an incident that cannot be immediately assimilated into the self. Caruth's concept of "return of the repressed" will also be demonstrated in light of the novels, which is the repeated possession of suppressed memories because of trauma. As the thesis culminates in a thorough analysis of the characters' narratives, Caruth's notion of the recovery of trauma will be observed in Bujar's ending, as well as the "unhealability" of the void can be demonstrated in Ripley's journey.

Sanders argues that Highsmith uses Tom Ripley's trauma as a vehicle for sympathy, despite the crimes he commits throughout the novel. She states that Highsmith skillfully exposes Tom's vulnerabilities to the readers from early on, even before the morbid acts he commits, creating a pitiable impression of his character. It emphasises how Tom's traumatic childhood is marked by trauma and harsh treatment from his Aunt Dottie, recounting memories of her calling him a "sissy". Sporadic flashbacks of his unresolved trauma are sprinkled across the novel, which Sanders labels as "a mechanism to make readers sympathise with him," as well as a justification of his violence (18). Furthermore, Sanders draws a connection with the excerpts, how Tom's emotional vulnerability is highlighted through his reactions to tenderness from the

Greenleaf family. Even during the events of the murder, as Tom strikes Dickie, the traumatic past seems to resurface as Tom still remembers Aunt Dottie's insult, and it keeps coming up in his head anytime he feels miserable, and his father's absence lingers like a phantom (Sanders 20). While the essay enriches the understanding and portrayal of trauma for this thesis, there is not enough evidence in Sanders' claim of how trauma justifies the criminal actions. This research will acknowledge trauma being a vehicle of sympathy without justifying or sanctioning the crimes. Sanders' argument will also be traced in my reading of *Crossing*, where trauma not only allows the reader to sympathise with Bujar but also empathise with him, giving a broader perspective in understanding trauma. This thesis will observe the brilliance of Highsmith and Statovci in showcasing trauma as a trajectory that leads to identity alteration.

Salami uses Heinz Kohut's psychoanalytic theory on early stages of identity development, empathy and narcissistic rage to read into Tom Ripley's psychological foundation. In his study, along with co-author Mohammadi, the roots of violence and abuse in adulthood are aligned in a theoretical approach. Kohut goes beyond the Freudian approach by defining trauma "without libido" while stressing the significance of self-objects that are "either used in the service of the self and of the maintenance of its instinctual investment, or objects which are themselves experienced as part of the self" (124). Salami incorporates the mirroring transference into Tom Ripley's character. Using Kohutian phraseology, Salami calls Tom the "tragic man", a person in need of establishing "self-cohesion" (Salami, Mohammadi 3). He calls Tom a product of narcissistic injury because of his childhood abuse as well as the loss of his identity. In accordance with Kohut's theory, this thesis will explore the process of deconstruction of identity that both Ripley and Statovci's Bujar go through. Salami's article supports the claims of this research; however, an extensive analysis is due on the subject.

Hussain consults John Bowlby's Monotropic Theory of Attachment in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley*, tracing the evolution-based attachment through Tom Ripley's life and how the lack of a primary caregiver in his early childhood has altered his personality. Bowlby's proposed theory explores the undesirable consequences—focusing on how a child's personality evolves over time when they are not cared for by a parent. The novel's portrayal of Tom is examined through a critical reading, highlighting his lack of regard for human life and guilt. Hussain uses Bowlby's theory to understand the root cause of Tom's psychopathic tendencies, concluding that the dramatic deterioration of his character is because he did not have the luxury of having a guardian or caretaker. As attachment theory suggests, forming attachments since infancy is innate and fundamental to development. Hussain stresses the fact that the death of Tom Ripley's parents as an infant has a significant impact on his psychological development. Bowlby in *Attachment and Loss: Separation* (1973) describes the important role played by attachment by stating that when the need for security is unmet, the individual might view the world as "comfortless and unpredictable, and they respond either by shrinking from it or doing battle with it" (208). The absence of his parents was not the only driving force, but also the traumatic experiences Tom Ripley underwent because of his aunt Dottie, who constantly abused and berated him. His "rise to criminality", states Hussain, is linked to his tumultuous childhood and the inhumane treatment his aunt Dottie subjected him to. This left a void in Ripley's life and gave birth to his villainous tendencies. By murdering Dickie, Ripley attempts to gain what he lost as a child and adopt Dickie's identity. Hussain suggests that after the murder, a "newborn" Ripley is conceived, as he tries to adapt to his new surroundings.

Through Hussain's research, the attachment theory can also be traced in *Crossing*, as Bujar's dysfunctional childhood impacts his perspective as an adult. Bujar grew up through his father's ideal view of how a man should be; the imposing heteronormative ideologies were forced upon him regardless of himself. Furthermore, losing his father at a very young age, excessive poverty, suffering the devastation of post-Communist Albania and the loss of his best friend, Bujar had a tumultuous childhood. This thesis will incorporate Hussain's research and Bowlby's attachment theory to compare and contrast both characters' childhoods.

Prigot's take on Tom Ripley—as well as Highsmith herself—consults the deviancy of the character. At first, reviewing the author's personal and political insights, she elaborates on the “deviants” of Highsmith's novels. This paper will look into her chapter “Deviancy as Reader Seduction” to analyse the ambiguity of Tom Ripley, while finding similarities with Bujar. Highsmith's literary methods enable the reader to question the wrongness of the characters' supposed deviancy as well as pose as a critic of the normalcy in society. Prigot describes Highsmith's deviants as primarily non-heterosexual, which is a response to a “society whose obsession with communism led to the nightmare of the collaborator hiding amongst us” (Prigot 5). She also calls this deviancy a means of freedom, liberating the characters from the societal norm that caters to conservative heterosexual men. According to Prigot, Tom Ripley's ambiguity works as a shield to swerve the focus away from his sexuality, while Highsmith antagonises the society fixated on binaries. Additionally, she argues on Shannon's claims of labelling Ripley as a “fetishist” and reinforces the idea of him being more of a “sensualist”. Driven by passion, Ripley's infatuations manifest in various subjects, “from passionately caressing the taut sheets of a bed to having extremely sensual sex.” Despite this, Tom is never seen to have any form of

intimacy with anyone, man or woman, yet there is a burning desire to control Dickie. Tom's dominant and sexually ambiguous side of him is why Prigot calls him a deviant who represents a plausible response to a society determined to regulate every aspect of people's lives. The "normalcy" in the society of the 1950s had clearly defined standards of an attractive man—middle to upper class, heterosexual and above any perversion. Prigot articulates that, by making Ripley a stark contrast to that normalcy, and adding the criminal records, Highsmith manages to seduce the reader through Tom's deviant nature. While taking notes of Prigot's research, this paper will highlight Tom's ambiguity in sexual expression and incorporate ideas into Bujar's deviancy. The concept of ambiguity supports the blurred distinctions of identity, making it difficult for characters to be confined to a single box or a binary category that society demands. Prigot's research also examines two other novels by Highsmith and subsequently delves deeper into Highsmith's own deviancy; however, this paper will focus solely on Tom Ripley's deviancy in relation to his identity.

Kaiissar orchestrates her analysis by drawing on multiple angles of trauma theory and queer theory in Statovci's *Crossing*, describing how one's 'queerness' is formed by individual and collective traumatic experiences. The catastrophic effects of trauma cause a disruption in a person's identity, and Kaiissar's study showcases its portrayal throughout Bujar's experiences. According to Kaiissar, trauma itself is "queer" in the sense that it is an undesirable onset of experiences that often occurs in queer people. Applying several trauma theories, including Caruth's approach, Kaiissar examines the "detrimental effects on the configuration of Bujar's queer identity" as he "fails to come to terms with his trauma" (Kaiissar, 69). In exploring Bujar's queerness, she uses the term 'queer' not as a mere synonym for homosexual individuals, but as

an umbrella term for the wide spectrum of people who don't fit into conventional standards in society. Queerness is defined broadly as sexual otherness. The term 'queer' is commonly used to condemn heterosexual, heteronormative, and binary gender standards. (72) Therefore, they are faced with social prejudice and persecution. However interlinked is the trauma with queer identity, she claims that trauma is not a byproduct of queerness, but the conglomeration of unfortunate events that happened in Bujar's life. Kaiissar's research contributes significantly to the enrichment of scholarly works on *Crossing*, as Statovci's books do not receive sufficient attention. Her study also supports this thesis's claims of trauma, the disintegration of identity through traumatic experiences, and the foundation of queer or fluid identity. This thesis will also employ and relate this scholarly discipline to explore Highsmith's novel and pinpoint the difference between the two characters. Kaiissar uses Caruth's terms of "survivor's guilt" to describe Bujar's state of mind after losing his dear one, which is a patent distinction between Ripley. Kaiissar also states that, despite trying to come to terms with his trauma, Bujar fails and goes through the "diffusion of self". This research argues against this failure, drawing on components of Caruth's theory to demonstrate progress in trauma healing. While exploring queer theory and the fluidity of gender, Kaiissar employs Butler's theory of gender performance, which is another key component of this thesis. She states that Bujar's ever-shifting gender performance is due to his trauma, which affected and negotiated with his queer identity. Addressing the ways in which other contemporary queer literature both reflects and advances the study of the relationship between trauma and queerness is crucial, according to Kaiissar.

Chartrand and Bargh's psychological experiment, "The Chameleon Effect: The Perception-Behaviour Link and Social Interaction," introduces the idea of nonconscious

mimicry through mannerisms, behaviour, accent, and the overall copying of a person's interactional partner. This theory proposes that observing other people's behaviour within proximity activates an automatic response to mimic them. According to the study, nonconscious mimicry is adopted in order to establish rapport with one another, as they call this phenomenon a "social glue" to acquire social acceptance. Several case studies were done to achieve this effect, for example, the participants were more inclined to adopt the behaviours of the stereotypes. In another case study, participants subtly mimicked behaviours such as foot shaking or face rubbing with their conversational partners during their interactions. The Chameleon Effect is more productive when the participants have a bias towards their partners, which can be observed in the light of *Crossing* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. While this study leans more towards the nonconscious mimicry, the characters in the novels adopt their mimicry more consciously, with the exception of certain instances. Nevertheless, at the core of these behaviours stems the need for social acceptance, which aligns with the behaviours of Ripley and Bujar.

Scopes and Limitations

While this research contributes to important gaps in the literary space, it acknowledges some inevitable limitations. First and foremost, this thesis conducts a qualitative analysis, making the subjectivity of the methodology accessible to interpretations. To prevent arbitrary translation, several theoretical frameworks are employed, including trauma theory, concepts of mimicry and masquerade, performative identity and gender performance.

Secondly, this research concentrates on two novels that are well over a few generations apart, and thus, there is a limitation in textual data that connects *Crossing* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. This thesis seeks to take the initiative in filling that void by looking into both dimensions of the novels through similar yet distinctive patterns. The multifaceted concentration of the study establishes its scope in the scholarly sphere.

Additionally, because of the thesis' unique contents, the availability of academic resources and access to secondary literature are faced with certain restrictions. Notwithstanding the challenges, maximum efforts have been made to incorporate journals, papers, articles and essays on relevant discourse and link them into the primary texts.

Lastly, the viewpoint of the researcher invariably configures this particular reading of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*, acknowledging that other scholars might view the works differently. The appeal in qualitative research is the ample room for perspectives, and while this thesis provides enough space for discussion, it maintains consistent arguments within theoretical frameworks. Consequently, these restrictions or limitations don't diminish or undermine the significance of this research and the role it plays in enhancing scholarship done on *Crossing* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

Analysis

The five-part analysis will consult the prevalent themes reflected in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*, utilising the theoretical frameworks that align with the texts. For the sake of maintaining a gradual timeline with the texts, the analysis will first investigate trauma through the Caruthian lens, the root cause of identity deconstruction, which results in masquerading. The second chapter will explore the portrayal of masquerading, the relationship between masking and identity, and the facets and elements of the masquerade that take place in the novels being applied. In the third chapter, Goffman's module of performance will be traced through the characters' interactions with the outside world, as they take on roles of actors in a theatre performance. Performance can be conscious and nonconscious, which is assessed through the chameleon effect. Consequently, the fourth chapter draws attention to Tom and Bujar's marginalised queer identities in the context of Judith Butler's gender performativity. The last and fifth chapter of the thesis provides insights, parallels and contrasts, as well as the consequences of the aftermath in both novels.

Chapter 1

Trauma & Fragmented Self: Deconstruction Of Identity

The word trauma is tossed around arbitrarily, and it's often assumed as a fraction of the past tucked away with harrowing memories. In reality, it is anything but a thing of the past; it is a persistent presence that occurs in repetitions and often much later than the traumatic event. It's like rust over the cogs inside a person's mind, not letting them function normally, a potent cognitive disruption. It provokes instabilities, causing one to lose their conceptions of self, while concurrently "threatening and disintegrating one's identity" (Kaiissar 69). In *The Trauma*

Question, Roger Luckhurst calls trauma a paradigm of the mental wound, as it has been turned “into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated cultural life” (Luckhurst 12). For this reason, the analysis will begin to locate the portrayal of trauma to understand the complex behaviours and patterns in the novels. Applying Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), this research will demonstrate the manifestations of trauma in Ripley and Bujar, and why their trauma acts as the root cause of malformed identity, and they are prone to guise as someone else. Caruth’s general definition of trauma resonates with the main characters’ experiences as she articulates, “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 57-58). Asserting trauma as an ‘unclaimed’ part of one’s experiences, she calls it a suppressed event that is trapped in our unconsciousness; an “exemplary conceptual knot” that shrouds other events into darkness. Through a Caruthian lens, this chapter will witness and testify to the portrayals of trauma in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*.

1.1 Manifestation of Trauma in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Highsmith’s intention was never to focus on Tom Ripley’s trauma and paint him to be the “tragic man” as Salami states in his reading of the novel (Salami, Mohammadi 3). Instead, she intended to humanise Tom’s character through his past trauma and its aftereffects, rather than making him a one-dimensional antagonist. Despite his criminal activities throughout the novel and beyond, as four subsequent novels centre on the same character, readers see Ripley as an anti-hero instead of a full-fledged villain. It is perhaps due to the “seduction” of his complex

characteristics that pulls the readers on his side, even playing the devil's advocate for him (Prigot 27). The narrative touches on Tom's neurotic symptoms without explicitly exploring them, letting the subtle actions speak for themselves. However, Highsmith doesn't waste a page to introduce Tom's unstable mental state as the novel starts with him being hyperconscious of his surroundings, as if someone is going to attack or arrest him. At the beginning of the book, he appears paranoid, sitting at a bar while assessing people around him, and sees a man heading towards him, which he immediately considers as a threat. Regardless of the cause, Tom is constantly anxious about someone following, because, "if there was any sensation he hated, it was that of being followed, by anybody. And lately he had it all the time" (10). This hypervigilance is caused by the traumatic experiences he had as a child. Caruth posits that trauma is an intrusive obstacle that constantly makes reappearances, simply because it "lurks", the term proposed by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (12). The "lurking" is an uncanny sensation that Tom experiences, not being able to fathom what truly haunts him. Having lost his parents at a very young age, Tom was deprived of parental care. According to Bowlby, the lack of an effective caregiver impedes a person's psychological development, which is connected to the rise of Tom's criminality (Hussain 615). Attachment theory grants the three stages where the disrupted connection happens in Tom's life, and it inadvertently centres around his childhood trauma (614). The constant humiliation from his Aunt Dottie left a mental wound in his mind. He recalls these instances throughout the novel as several occasions of Aunt Dottie's abuse resurface in completely separate moments. They plague his mind like a haunting presence, and the continual occurrence is one of the key features of trauma. Caruth suggests the "unassimilated nature" of trauma, meaning that they are not linear and they emerge belatedly as fragmented memory (124). The non-linear narratives are found in Tom Ripley's flashbacks as they reappear

right before he embarks on his journey to Europe. He remembered the event when he was twelve, Aunt Dottie and her friend took him on a cross-country trip, and they were stuck in a traffic jam in the midst of it:

It had been a hot summer day, and Aunt Dottie had sent him out with the Thermos to get some ice water at a filling station, and suddenly, the traffic had started moving. He remembered running between huge, inching cars, always about to touch the door of Aunt Dottie's car and never being quite able to, because she had kept inching along as fast as she could go, not willing to wait for him a minute, and yelling, "Come on, come on, slowpoke!" out the window all the time. When he had finally made it to the car and got in, with tears of frustration and anger running down his cheeks, she had said gaily to her friend, "Sissy! He's a sissy from the ground up. Just like his father!" (Highsmith 34)

This flashback is crucial to understanding Tom's trauma as fragments of the event repeatedly appear later on. It also probes at his marginalised identity as a queer individual at a very young age, long before he can have an understanding of his cohesive self.

While discussing the language of trauma, Caruth mentions, "the danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much" (154). Trauma integrates into Tom's disjointed narrative, as he responds to it with extreme emotions. Whenever he is plagued by a strong sense of shame or distress, the flashbacks of Aunt Dottie calling him a "sissy" would resurface. For instance, during their last trip together in Cannes, Dickie ridicules him for enjoying a group of men performing acrobatics. Tom feels extreme emotions of shame, as it triggers the recurrence of his Aunt Dottie's voice calling him "sissy" in that moment (Highsmith 96). Tom tries to 'reclaim' the "unclaimed

experiences” of trauma in a twisted imagination, by “hitting her with his fists, flinging her to the ground and throttling her, and finally tearing the big brooch off her dress and stabbing her a million times in the throat” (Highsmith 35). His trauma turns into violence, which Salami incorporates as “narcissistic rage”, implementing Kohut’s theory of narcissism (Salami, Mohammadi 1).

Caruth explains how trauma responses manifest in an array of repetitive and unanticipated flashbacks, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours from the event (17). She borrows Freud’s phrase “return of the repressed” for this condition, as the traumatic experience is trapped in a person’s unconsciousness and returns from the past to the present, hindering affairs in everyday life. To illustrate Tom’s experience, there is a scene where he has an irrational fear when Mr Greenleaf joins him in the living room. In Tom’s eyes, Mr Greenleaf’s figure seemed to “pulsate and grow larger and larger. Tom blinked his eyes, feeling a sudden terror of him, an impulse to attack him before he was attacked” (22). This triggers his trauma that’s stuck in his repressed mind, causing a fight or flight response from him. Because of his childhood trauma, his need for security is unmet, which is why he responds to the world by “shrinking from it or battling with it” (Hussain 613).

One of the critical setbacks Tom experiences is the rejection by Dickie. Dickie is the object of his desire, and the betrayal he feels when he is cast aside comes as a “wordless shock” of his realisation that’s too much for him to bear (Highsmith, 71). As explained by Caruth, trauma is experienced “as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment,” a phenomenon causing a departure from the traumatic event (17). The realisation comes afterwards as a delayed response to the fact that they were not friends. Caruth explains that trauma responses are often associated with fragmented narratives, hallucinations, silence and

gaps in memory which repeat like an erratic pulse. After Tom murders Dickie to assume his persona, he gets vivid nightmares about Dickie coming back to life, swimming back from the depths of the sea. It could be a modicum of guilt in the back of his mind, which is parallel to Caruth's crisis of death. Highsmith illustrates:

The scene dissolved in swirling yellow-greyness, the colour of the sand in Mongibello. Tom saw Dickie smiling at him, dressed in the corduroy suit that he had worn in San Remo. The suit was soaking wet, the tie a dripping string. Dickie bent over him, shaking him. 'I swam!' he said. 'Tom, wake up! I'm all right! I swam! I'm alive!' Tom squirmed away from his touch. He heard Dickie laugh at him, Dickie's happy, deep laugh. 'Tom!' The timbre of the voice was deeper, richer, better than Tom had even been able to make it in his imitations. (Highsmith 162)

The return of the repressed occurs through harrowing nightmares, with interesting details like Dickie's imagery wearing his own corduroy suit, as if he not only killed Dickie that day, but he also killed Tom Ripley in the process. It confirms the claims of the destruction of his past identity as himself to a point of no return.

1.2 Trauma in *Crossing*

Crossing tells a story of trauma that can be explored from multiple perspectives. Statovci's brilliance in portraying Bujar's trauma offers an important supplement to not only literary trauma but also the understanding of trauma in real life. Reading into Bujar's trauma and his response to trauma creates an existential dimension of the human condition, which is personalised, historicised, contextualised, as well as metaphorised (Schönfelder 29). According to Caruth, the paradigm of trauma is through its disjointed narrative, and Statovci's non-linear narrative style mirrors this distortion. Additionally, Bujar's trauma itself has no narrative order, as the past and the present become jumbled together in fragmented, nonlinear narratives. The origins of Bujar's trauma start from his childhood, the agonising experience in poverty-stricken Albania, the untimely death of his father, and the disappearance of his sister. After running away from home, he had to endure continuous sexual assault from his employer, Mr Selim, which engenders trauma regarding his queer identity. Kaiissar suggests that this painful experience is "formative to his queer gender and sexual identity as an adult" (74). Although it may have some effect, Bujar's attraction towards Agim goes further back in the timeline as they engage in intimate activities (Statovci 132), and the correlation between incidents does not equate to causation. The persistent "re-experiencing" of trauma that Caruth (1996) mentions occurs when Bujar is violated by Anton in Germany. But this time, instead of enduring, he fights back and lashes out, "screaming at the top of my lungs and rage through his apartment". He picks up a knife from the kitchen while threatening the man; his impulses are "ready to slash his throat, ready to strike the knife into his groin" (Statovci 91). This rage is similar to the "narcissistic rage" that Tom Ripley displays, but instead of acting out these impulses, Bujar decides to leave and run from the place.

Agim's death—the loss of his best friend and his beloved—completely shatters any stability of Bujar's mental health. The only person he had after his childhood turmoil died on their way to cross the border and start a new life. It makes the events more devastating because Bujar is responsible for Agim's demise after having a skirmish on the boat. Agim makes sexual advances on him in the darkness, while he was already frightened, and it triggers his trauma of being sexually violated. His immediate reaction is to battle against the source of his fear, in Bowlby's words, as he shoves Agim off the boat and lets him drown to death (Statovci 217). The flashbacks of this incident are not mentioned until the end of the novel, indicating Caruth's "delayed response" to trauma rather than the actual time of the traumatic events (4). Upon the loss of Agim, Bujar experiences double trauma, Caruth's "crisis of death" followed by the "crisis of life" (7). The crisis of death elucidates the proximity to death, which, in Bujar's case, is the shock of experiencing his best friend's death. By the "crisis of life", Caruth essentially denotes the crisis of survivors who are pardoned by death. Bujar has extreme survivor's guilt from Agim's death, so much so, he lives through Agim's gender queer identity, which is a way of keeping him alive. The crisis of death and life can be referenced in Statovci's words, as he mentions "the dead who were never found and the lost who didn't want to be found (32). Trauma slithers its way into Bujar's mind through repeated flashbacks, disjointed narratives, dreams and hallucinations. The severity of his trauma led him to a suicide attempt by jumping off a building at Piazza Navona, but he ended up being unsuccessful. In the brief state of comatose, Bujar encounters a dream, where he is "standing on a mountainside in a pair of high heels, a set of white wings growing from my back, and I imagine this is what it must be like to be dead" (Statovci 69). The red heels symbolise Bujar's queer identity, and his wings are the freedom that he was able to achieve by escaping Albania. As he soared high up in the sky, one of his shoes fell

to the mountain far below, where a “familiar-looking boy was standing”, who looked just like him. The familiar boy is Agim, as Bujar recounts and relives his trauma through the blurring lines of truth and fiction. The dream continues as he would “watch how the boy stands up, the shoe on one foot, then topples over and starts rolling down the mountainside, how he shouts as he hits the stones and branches strewn across the terrain, how he rolls all the way to the bottom, and how he eventually strikes his head against a boulder and dies wearing the high heel, in a land where no one will ever step foot” (ibid 69).

Statovci employs symbolism and metaphor to visualise the effects of trauma, rather than explicating the grievous issues surrounding it. In the final scene, he uses the illusion of a horse to depict Agim’s reappearance in Bujar’s mind, saying “in the morning my beloved appears as a horse” (216), and it is finally revealed how Agim dies.

1.3 Collective Trauma in *Ripley* and *Crossing*

Personal trauma aside, there are collective traumas that the characters Ripley and Bujar experience, which go beyond their individual occurrences. These traumas are tied to external factors that surround their identity, such as nationality, lineage, social hierarchy, gender and sexuality, etc. Caruth connects the relationship between trauma and history, emphasising the fact that trauma is not only psychological, but also relative to history. She states, “the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess and thus which possesses them” (Caruth 34).

1.3.1 Inherited Trauma:

Categorising trauma as a historical symptom, Caruth explains how trauma can be passed on through generations. This inherited trauma haunts future generations like a “ghost”, a looming presence from the past. Tom’s inherited trauma is his fear of water, because his parents drowned

in Boston Harbour when he was a child, and he “had always thought that probably had something to do with it, because as long as he could remember he had been afraid of water, and he had never learned how to swim” (Highsmith 23). Despite not even knowing his parents, he inherited the trauma without being directly involved in the incident. Later in the chapters, when he murders Dickie, he slips and almost drowns in the sea, which had him “revisiting” this trauma. Tom inherits his father’s trauma through Aunt Dottie’s taunt, “Sissy! He’s a sissy from the ground up. Just like his father!” (Highsmith 34). He never got the chance to know his father, but Aunt Dottie’s abuse and constant “sly comparisons of him to his father” (33) result in trauma’s transmission from one generation to another.

In Bujar’s case, the inherited trauma is tied to his nationality, as Albania is depicted in socio-political devastation. Bujar’s birthplace, Tirana, Albania, is affected by dictatorship and communism under Enver Hoxha’s rule, which precipitates extreme poverty, disruption in communities and infrastructure, rendering a lawless country. Even though his father tells him glorious stories of Albanian myths, the reality ushers in generational trauma upon Bujar. Moreover, the myths that lionise Albanian masculinity are transferred from his father to him, the adamancy to “die like a man” (101) can be considered inherited trauma regarding his queer identity.

1.3.2 Collective Trauma as Queer Individuals:

Historically speaking, the group of people belonging to a sexual minority—or any kind of minority for that matter—have been faced with collective trauma for their marginalised identity. Hence, Ripley and Bujar, as individuals who don't quite fit in the heteronormative standards, are automatically subjected to social castration. According to Davies, homosexuals or “illegitimates” had to bear a social stigma that required them to be hidden from most people of society, except

their own (Davies 41). As a result, they have to bear a collective trauma due to the stigma surrounding them. Because of this, both Ripley and Bujar refuse to label themselves as “queer” when they are confronted.

1.4 Deconstruction of Identity through Trauma: Loss, Fragmentation of Self and Identity Crisis

One's identity is not tied to selfhood, but to the factors that surround a person, the experiences that shape, reshape and destroy their sense of identity. Due to the mental wound of trauma, trauma survivors lose their perception of themselves, which prompts the absence of a "true self". As Caruth interprets, "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). The incomprehensible narratives of trauma have the likelihood of distorting the "truths" of traumatic events. In the topic of "complex trauma", Herman argues that prolonged or chronic exposure to interpersonal traumatic stress can severely disrupt an individual's perception of self and others, leading to identity crises and ruptured relationships (Herman 119-21). Disruption of perception results in a fragmented self and creates a disparity between the person they were before the traumatic experience and afterwards. This is the deconstruction of one's identity. The trauma and transgressions both Ripley and Bujar experience lead to them losing their past identities, as they are left with fractured remnants of themselves.

In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom loathes himself so much that he rejoices in the "annihilation of self" once he assumes Dickie's identity. Highsmith delivers:

This was the clean slate he had thought about on the boat coming over from America.

This was the real annihilation of his past and of himself, Tom Ripley, who was made up of that past, and his rebirth as a completely new person. (Highsmith 125-126)

These views on self-annihilation and erasure are in parallel with Bujar's hatred towards his past self, as Statovci writes:

After that, I moved to Rome and decided to forget everything that had happened to me, I erased my name from my memory, forgot my former home and deceased relatives [...] I forsook my hopes and dreams, for there was nothing good about my past; there was nothing in the past to which I wished to return or that I wanted to tell people about, and nothing in my past had helped me get where I wanted to be. (Statovci 80)

Due to having excessive hatred towards themselves and their turbulent past experiences, Ripley and Bujar cling to the idea of a "clean slate" (Highsmith 31) or a "fresh start" (Statovci 117) so they can be whatever identity they desire. Trauma impaired their perception of themselves, causing the deconstruction of identity, like a boat without a rudder. They isolate themselves from others because they are unable to develop or sustain a healthy relationship with anyone. This alienation is borne of the "diffusion of self" (Kaiissar 71). As their identities go through deconstruction and fragmentation due to trauma, they resort to masking and impersonating other people's identities as a coping mechanism. The masquerading serves as not only a coping mechanism for trauma, but also attempts to redefine their identities.

Chapter 2:

Masquerading And Identities

Efrat Tseëlon's book, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, expounds on the concepts of masking and masquerade, while also serving as a bridge between scholarly literature on masquerading and identity. While the essays delve into the multifaceted approach to masking and identity, they all adhere to the core objective of theorising the “dynamic interplay among masking, identity, difference and the processes of constructing and deconstructing order” (Kaiser 2001 xv). Keeping such aspirations in mind, the theoretical lens through which masking is observed can be traced in postmodern literature like *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*. According to Tseëlon, masking is a tool in deconstructing the strict notions of identity. The ties between masquerading and identity are interwoven as this chapter discusses whether masquerading serves as a coping mechanism or a foundation for identity reformation in the characters Ripley and Bujar.

The dual quality of reality and fantasy lies at the heart of a masquerade, akin to a Venetian carnival, the birthplace of Tseëlon's idea. In the introduction of conceptualising masquerading, Tseëlon uses the film *High Heels* (1991) as an example. Judge Dominguez takes on an investigation to solve Manuel's murder, and while doing so, he “embodies several incompatible, astereotypical masquerades all at once” (Tseëlon 1). From deviant (drug dealer) to marginalised Other (drag artist), the clear representations are pointed out. Immediately upon noting this example, the paradoxes of appearance are found in Highsmith's *Ripley*. However, instead of conducting an investigation, Tom Ripley's uses his masquerade as a perpetrator, in an attempt to conceal his deviancy and Otherness. He assumes Dickie Greenleaf's identity by murdering him, transitioning from Thomas Ripley to Dickie Greenleaf. Meanwhile, the explicit

association of masquerade with gender, sexuality and identity in Tseëlon's latter discussions aligns with *Crossing*, as the character Bujar maintains a chameleon-like persona throughout the novel. Bujar embodies the essence of Tseëlon's arguments on masquerading as the marginalised, using his mask as a “challenge to the easy notions of binarity” (Garber 10). One of the major reasons for this masquerading is his trauma from losing Agim and being disconnected from self, discussed in the previous chapter. While Tom Ripley's mask is a fixed one—impersonating Dickie as himself—Bujar wears an inconsistent mask, ranging from different genders, nationalities and characteristics.

The definition of masquerade coheres with the important semantic distinction between mask, masquerade and disguise. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, masking refers to “protecting or hiding”, and disguise is defined as misinterpretation of something, all the while masquerade means impersonation, in the sense of assuming “false appearance”. Despite these distinctions, all of them have the key feature of concealing. Tseëlon endorses her definition of masquerade, which negates the idea of being false, but is a statement of the wearer. She writes:

It is pleasurable, excessive, sometimes subversive. The mask is partial covering; disguise is full covering; masquerade is deliberate covering. The mask hints; disguise erases from view; masquerade overstates. The mask is an accessory; disguise is a portrait; masquerade is a caricature. (Tseëlon 02)

While these differences help understand the origin of the word masquerade, Tseëlon's research focuses on the similarities between the three. These terms are used interchangeably here, as the function of masquerade is to recognise the fundamental issues of identity. Whether it is the “truth” of identity, the stability and instability of identity, the relationship between “supposed

identity and its outward manifestations”, masquerading works through concealing and revealing certain aspects of a person (Tseëlon 04). Borrowing these clearly defined terminologies, this analysis focuses on the disguise aspects of masquerading, as well as the elements of impersonation; both Bujar and Ripley use masks as a means to disguise and disclose themselves, while it serves as a caricature of Agim and Dickie.

2.1 Identity Vs Masquerade

The concept of masks dates back to the second century BCE, from the Latin word “persona”, which translates to mask. “Persona” signifies an image of a person, containing the notion of artifice but also the notion of a person’s role. This role is reinforced by one’s ‘true’ face, character, and thus, one’s identity (Mauss, qtd. in Tseëlon 25). Contemporary approaches connect identity with selfhood, a construction by which a person is known and assessed. Disguise is a “design feature” of the construction, making ‘masquerade’ a defining trait of identity. There are two approaches to the mask in relation to identity, one dividing the self and mask, while the other approach endorses the authentic manifestations of self through masking. The first approach assumes that the authentic identity is cloaked under the mask, which relies on the belief in a singular reality. Peter Brook labels this kind of mask as a hiding space, solely emphasising the disguise element of masking. Meanwhile, Sorrell considers masks as an imaginary shield that protects a person against the outer reality as well as protects them against their own self. After exploring various perspectives on masking, Tseëlon acknowledges that while masking can be used to disguise oneself, it also holds some truth to one’s identity. This make-believe reality allows them to thrive in spaces they are not otherwise able to, given external factors like social constructs (Tseëlon 25).

In accordance with these ideas on how masquerading and identity are coherently tied together, they can be applied to Ripley and Bujar's circumstances. Questions arise, then, who are they behind their masks? Do these masks define them or help them disguise? There are no strict definitions to these questions, as identity is not a linear concept—it is not a product that can be easily categorised. Identity is always an ongoing process. For those who have fragmented identities with disjointed narratives from trauma, identity is a greater labyrinth filled with complexities. However, the multiplicity of identities is revealed through Ripley and Bujar's masks, as these manifestations can be traced with textual evidence.

2.2 Ripley's Masquerade: Turning into Dickie Greenleaf

When reading Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, it is easy to make allusions to Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde with Tom Ripley's pathological character. Between Tom Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf, he oscillates effortlessly, turning into a different person at will. Despite this, Tom doesn't wake up and become a different person; he *adopts* it. He wears a distinct identity to protect his own. While doing so, he alters his mask and gives it a new life that becomes a part of him. Tom follows both philosophies of masking; while he uses the mask to cover the authenticity of the self, he also displays fragments of himself through the mask he wears. According to Yeats, retreating from the reality of the self is not a fictitious creation, but a "heroic ideal one", which presents another perspective that goes against conventional views. He believes that the mask is an "active virtue" because it serves as a form of disciplinary constraint, enabling one to achieve victory over circumstances (151). Perhaps Highsmith herself believed in that unconventional virtue, hence she gave Ripley a "happy ending", triumphantly letting him roam free with Dickie's inheritance despite the crimes he committed.

Even before assuming Dickie's identity, Tom's biggest talent is mimicking and replicating other people, as it is portrayed all across the novel. Earlier in the book, he utilises his talent in various instances, being a con artist under the disguise of George McAlpin, Collector of Internal Revenue. Dickie's identity is not the only one he steals and impersonates, and surely not his first. During his job at the Internal Revenue office as a stockroom clerk, Tom learnt how things worked in the office, and kept a list of names as "prospects", who were artists and freelancers. He would call these people while masquerading himself as McAlpin, and accuse them of making a two to three-hundred-dollar error in tax computations. He could easily manipulate his voice through this deceptive type of masking, just as he fools a comic artist named Reddington through the phone. As Highsmith depicts, "He sounded like a genial old codger of sixty-odd, who might be as patient as could be if Mr Reddington came in, but who wouldn't yield by so much as a red cent, for all the talking and explaining Mr Reddington might do. George McAlpin represented the Tax Department of the United States of America, huh" (Highsmith 14). It is evident here how Tom's masking can be "a measure of power", especially accessible to men in social relations. (Tseñlon 33)

As soon as Tom is presented with the opportunity to visit Europe by Mr Greenleaf, he feels empowered. The promise of his travel expenses being covered gives a new height to his being, and unbeknownst to Tom himself, Highsmith shows how he already goes through the process of masquerading:

Slowly, he took off his jacket and untied his tie, watching every move he made as if it were somebody else's movements he was watching. Astonishing how much straighter he was standing now, what a different look there was in his face. It was one of the few times in his life that he felt pleased with himself. (Highsmith 10)

Regardless of who is watching, he is always performing, as disguise comes naturally to him, which merely adds to the semblance of the “other self” that he wishes to show to the world (Prigot 31). This performative habit can be demonstrated through Goffman’s performance of the self, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Circling back to the “otherness” in masking, Tseëlon attests that through masking, a moment of reflexivity about the otherness (within and beyond) can be revealed (Kaiser xiv). Ripley is constantly trying to separate the self and the other by disguising the ‘otherness’ within himself. This stems from the shortcomings within himself, including his trauma, life in poverty and belonging to the lower class, as well as being a queer man. Because of his past being mired in trauma and poverty, he keeps on hiding it, calling his new journey “a clean slate” (Highsmith 31). He describes his past life with negative connotations, as a myriad of failures and mistakes. The desire for the complete “annihilation of the past” makes him adopt masking, and Dickie embodies all that he ever wanted. Between desiring Dickie and desiring to *become* Dickie, the lines become blurred, and his vices take over after he gets rejected. Once he finally murders Dickie and thieves his identity, Tom also murders himself as Tom Ripley. The self-annihilation disintegrates the sense of order regarding a person’s ‘true’ identity. However, through this masking, Tom wears his otherness in a self-assured manner, which he otherwise couldn’t while being Tom Ripley. After he transforms himself into Dickie Greenleaf, Highsmith writes:

He stood tall, straight, sober-faced, yet ready to smile if anyone had addressed him. He felt as he had felt on the ship, only more intensely, full of goodwill, a gentleman, with nothing in his past to blemish his character. He was Dickie, good-natured, naïve Dickie,

with a smile for everyone and a thousand francs for anyone who asked him. (Highsmith 127)

The brilliance of foreshadowing is clued on several occasions before the murder and masquerade. Highsmith deliberately draws a physical comparison between Tom and Dickie in a scene where they are seated in the carrozza, across from each other, with a sandalled foot propped on a knee. From Tom's point of view, it was as though he was "looking in a mirror" when he looked at Dickie. He starts to notice their similarities in size, height and weight and the fact that Dickie is a bit on the heavier side than he is. The small difference can easily be dismissed as "they wore the same size bathrobe, socks, and probably shirts (Highsmith 55). Tom's observance creates an unconscious anticipation within him, a desire to become 'the self' as he sees Dickie as ideal and superior to himself, while simultaneously Dickie being so similar to 'the other' features an uncanny component of revealing and concealing. On the authority of Peters, Tom remains primarily within the "visual, imaginary realm, trapped within a fissure between mirroring and mimicry, utilising the structures of the Symbolic without recourse to its defining, limiting and prohibitive functions" (Peters 150, qtd. in Salami, Mohammadi 1). Tom inhibits this greed as it is offset in a tense mirror scene, when he wears Dickie's clothes and shoes to act as Dickie. This portrays the process of Tom's masquerading as he gradually transforms into Dickie's character.

He paces around the room for a few moments and then begins putting on Dickie's clothing. The suit fitted him. He re-parted his hair and put the part a little more to one side, the way Dickie wore his. "Marge, you must understand that I don't love you," Tom said into the mirror in Dickie's voice, with Dickie's higher pitch on the emphasized

words, with the little growl in his throat at the end of the phrase that could be pleasant or unpleasant, intimate or cool, according to Dickie's mood. (Highsmith 63)

We can see that through the overstatement of imitating Dickie, Tom's masquerading is a 'caricature' of Dickie's persona, as Tseëlon would call it. Dickie's clothes are his accessories; disguising or concealing his own self is a portrait, and the impersonation of Dickie is the caricature. Thus, the distinctions between mask, disguise and masquerade can be located through Tom Ripley's metamorphosis. Outwardly rejecting Marge is the reflexivity of Tom's otherness, and in a way, it represents his marginalised identity as a queer man, despite acting as Dickie, a heterosexual man.

2.3 Bujar's Masks in *Crossing*

In the masquerading scene, Bujar is an active performer with many masks that cohere with different identities. He doesn't murder his friend to steal his identity like Tom Ripley; instead, he lives vicariously through multiple masquerades, in a way of keeping Agim alive through these experiences. It is evident that he uses masquerading as a coping mechanism from trauma, while simultaneously, these masks serve to conceal and reveal certain aspects of his identity. Statovci relays postmodern views through Bujar's voice, as he says,

I can choose what I am, I can choose my gender, choose my nationality and my name, my place of birth, all simply by opening my mouth. Nobody has to remain the person they were born; we can put ourselves together like a jigsaw. (Statovci 9)

This aligns with Tseëlon's perception regarding the "true self" behind the masking, as she emphasises that one cannot plainly distinguish between a "real me" and "masked me", as there are boundaries and intersections within these identities (Kaiser xv). Furthermore, masquerading is not confined to gender, sexuality, class, nationality, race, etc. Throughout Bujar's inconsistent masking, he adopts different names, Anton or Adam or Gideon, just as he can dress up as a woman and name himself Amina or Anastasia. He considers dressing up as his "greatest quality" as he can slip into his masks whenever and however he pleases. Similarly, he can be from wherever in the world, "French, German or Greek, but never Albanian" (Statovci 7-9). When Bujar is readily posing as any nationality other than his original nationality, which is Albanian, he is playing into the dualistic aspect of masquerading through disclosure and disguise. It also appeals to the idea of otherness because his desire to become "self" reflects on the nationality he pretends to be while separating from the Albanian "other." His obstinacy against his past identity ends up highlighting that facet about him, offering an insight into his fractured selves. To quote Tseëlon, the masquerade "replaces clarity with ambiguity, certainty with reflexivity, and phantasmic constructions of containment and closure with constructions that in reality are more messy, diverse, impure and imperfect" (3). The clarity of Bujar's gender, sexuality, or nationality is replaced by the vague identifications that are always changing, as his existence itself challenges the construction of identity. As a result, Bujar's masquerading falls under the two philosophical approaches to masking. The "authentic self" is the one he desperately tries to conceal, much like Ripley, which is the self he was before traumatic experiences. Again, there is no "real self" secured beneath the mask, but his identity as Bujar, the Albanian refugee, is at the core of himself. The mask acts as a hiding place, as Brook suggests, from both external forces and from his own self (231). This marks masking as a coping mechanism from unhealed trauma,

while allowing his marginalised identity to flourish. Consequently, through each manifestation of his masks, he reveals the multiplicity of his fractured identities. For example, when he moves to America, he tells his flatmate Maria that he “acted all across Europe”. Although this disclosure alludes to his made-up career, it bears truth to the reality of the multiplicity of identities. When asked about the roles he played across Europe, Bujar explains, “in a Spanish movie I played a man who wanted to be a woman, and that I also starred in an Italian movie about life after an unsuccessful suicide attempt” (Statovci 89). In Spain, Bujar spent time getting used to the Spanish sunset and his lover, in a way, trying to fit into the heteronormative lifestyle until he is caught wearing her clothes (in the same way Tom was caught wearing Dickie’s), which ultimately cuts his time short. In Italy, after a few years of alienation and debilitating depression, he attempted to commit suicide, which was unsuccessful. These are facts drawn from his life, which he fictionalised for the sake of disguise. It is the truth wrapped in a lie, as the paradox of the masquerade appears to be, resembling a “neurotic symptom that reveals itself in the process of concealing” (Tseëlon 5).

The uncanny of Bujar’s masquerade unsettles the general populace around him when he dons an androgynous appearance. He calls it a game, wearing a formless cape and lets people make assumptions about his gender. This mask perturbs others, “like a splinter beneath their fingernail” (Statovci 8-9). It arouses a mixture of fascination and avoidance among the audience, as Tseëlon pens, acting as an “intermediary position” between two dimensions (20).

2.4 Inanimate Objects Acting As Masks

From antiquity to the present, masks are associated with rituals and events like rites of initiation, mortuary rites, warding off evil, parties and festivities, etc. These masks often evoke a

mixture of avoidance and interest, like the uncanny, they carry a sense of familiarity within the unknown. This exact feeling can be found when reading Highsmith and Statovci's novels, even though there are no literal 'masks' that the characters wear. Aside from the metaphysical masks that Ripley and Bujar wear, inanimate objects or possessions act as a form of masking in both texts. As Tseëlon asserts, "the mask is simultaneously animated and inanimate, living and dead: an expressionless mass transformed into expressive being." (21) The wearer infuses the inanimate objects with spirit, aiding the performance of masquerading.

Highsmith evidently discloses Ripley's love for possessions on several occasions, so much so that Edward A. Shannon, in his thesis, labels Tom as a fetishist. He claims that Tom's fetishistic desires are what drive him to murder Dickie and claim his possessions, and by doing so, he reaches an "orgasmic moment" (Shannon 26). However, in a close reading of the novel, Ripley's inclinations for possessions resonate a different meaning:

He loved possessions.... They gave a man self-respect. Not ostentation but quality, and the love that cherished the quality. Possessions reminded him that he existed and made him enjoy his existence. It was as simple as that. And wasn't that worth something? He existed. (Highsmith 244)

What Shannon fails to notice is that Tom Ripley does not lust after the material aspects of these possessions, but the expressive identity they bring to his life. In order to gain self-respect, confidence and qualities that he otherwise lacks, these possessions act as a mask to maintain his new persona. He spends his evenings looking at "his" clothes, which were once Dickie's, "feeling Dickie's rings between his palms, and running his fingers over the antelope suitcase he had bought at Gucci's", resulting in a complete identification with the masks. Dickie's identity is not the only mask in his performance, but also the inanimate objects that used to belong to

Dickie. In theatre and ritual, the impact of the mask describes the person, where “the wearer wishes to be identified with the mask they wear” (Gregor, qtd in Tseëlon 21). Similarly, Tom (the wearer) yearns to be identified with Dickie’s possessions (the mask). Dickie’s signature rings are one of the significant masks in the novel, as they are almost a defining trait of him. Even before Ripley claims them through Dickie’s murder, he had a fixation with them, spending his time examining the rings:

He liked them both: a large rectangular green stone set in gold on the third finger of his right hand, and on the little finger of the other hand a signet ring, larger and more ornate than the signet Mr. Greenleaf had worn. Dickie had long, bony hands, a little like his own hands, Tom thought. (Highsmith 42)

The rings, here, as Tseëlon says, are the mask that “mystifies the object of desire” (30). They represent Ripley’s yearning for belonging in the upper class, and associating it with Mr Greenleaf also channels his inner desire to claim Dickie’s spot as Mr Greenleaf’s son. The resemblance between Dickie and his physique only aids the process of masking. Highsmith employs the solidity of these objects to make the connections between “concrete and abstract facets of incidents” (Kerley, 18), which aligns with the concealing and revealing nature of masquerading. The rings later on, almost blow his cover when Marge finds them in a sewing kit of Tom’s possession, causing anxiety of losing his “mask”. When he puts on Dickie’s clothes for the first time and mimics him in front of a mirror, Dickie’s well-fitted suit and shirt serve as masks to embody Dickie’s persona. Other objects represent Tom Ripley’s mask that did not belong to Dickie, for example, the cap he buys in the haberdashery, a conservative, bluish-grey cap made of English wool. Highsmith writes: “He could look like a country gentleman, a thug,

an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a plain American eccentric, depending on how he wore it” (Highsmith 31).

Tom’s imagination takes over as he discovers that with this cap, the mask, he can be just about anyone. Whether he was a gentleman or a delinquent, English or French, no one could tell. The possibilities were endless, and the enigmatic quality of the mask exudes a power he didn’t know he had. Describing his face as “the world’s dullest face” with a perpetual look of docility, Tom finds it almost second nature to conceal his features under a veil.

Unlike Ripley, Statovci’s Bujar isn’t so indulgent in materialistic possessions, yet several inanimate objects help maintain his mask. Bujar’s complex character and inconsistent appearances stem from the uncertainty of identity that Tseëlon talks about in the chapter “Stigma, Uncertain Identity and Disguise”. (38) His tendency to constantly change from one role to another resembles an entertainer on stage, where an actor appears in various disparate and changing parts from one role to another. Through his disjointed narrative in *Crossing*, Bujar abandons and alters his age, sex, ethnicity and social class at will. This often goes against the Puritan views that the self ought to be “stable, fixed, uniform and distinct.” (Tseëlon 45)

In Germany, when Bujar disguises herself as a woman by dressing in “attractive colours, a tight blood-red top and a yellow silken scarf around [his] shoulders.” (Statovci 88) He breaks the basic habitual boundaries by being a man wearing women’s clothing (Davies, qtd. in Tseëlon 45), as the attire serves an important role in masking. His text about *Ugly* in the creative class is a mask in itself, as it gives an impression of his self-pity and self-hatred while playing the role of Ariana. Later on, after being found out that he was male in a woman’s clothing and was violated and cast out by the man of his interest, Bujar goes to a Turkish restaurant wearing “neat but baggy men’s

clothing” in need of work. This new attire works as a disguise for a new identity, continuing the cycle of his masquerade from one place to another. He goes back and forth with these masks, transforming himself according to the mask he wears. These objects, on their own, are lifeless matter, but as soon as they are worn, they come to life. Like a marionette that awakens from the pull of a string by its puppeteer. (Tseëlon 21)

2. 5 European Masquerade: *A Utopian Scene*

For many decades and centuries, face disguises like wearing masks and dressing up as something else have been a feature of European festivals. Carnivals are fertile grounds for indulgence and the pleasures of disguise, as well as they were an upside-down world for the “reversal of hierarchical relationships of masters and slaves, and replacement of refined and serious language of high culture with the obscene language of popular culture” (Bakhtin, qtd. in Tseëlon 27). According to Tseëlon, these reversals challenge institutional order by disrupting the categories, and that “it is only by breaking rules that one discovers which rules exist” (28). On that statement alone, there is a striking resemblance in Highsmith and Statovci’s principles. They both have a way of establishing order in disorder through unorthodox characterisations. From being the birthplace of the literal masquerade, European festivities became a symbolic and utopian space of masquerade, where people could “enjoy fleeting liberty from social, sexual and psychological constraints. Here they could discard their private, sexual, social and hierarchical identities and choose whichever identity they desired.” (Tseëlon 28)

From a global perspective, Europe essentially became a place where people can celebrate their liberty of marginalised identity. Thus, the idea of the European masquerade became a cultural and modern symbol which conveys multiple metaphoric possibilities; “as a site of

excess, ecstasy, intrigue and moral danger harbouring erotic, riotous and mysterious associations” (Tseëlon 29). The rebellious and mystifying allure of the European masquerade is glorified in numerous novels and literature, so much so that it brought about a sub-genre called Masquerading Romance. Similarly, in the novels *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*, Europe is depicted as a place where the characters voyage to, seeking liberty from social constraints and norms in their homeland. More specifically, Italy, where the carnivalesque originated from, alongside France, Greece, Germany and other European countries that sit at the forefront of social and communal hierarchy. These places are often associated with their rich historical festivities, folklore and arts, making it a utopian setting where marginalised people like Tom and Bujar can celebrate their temporary liberation from societal order, as Bakhtin calls it “marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibition” (104). As stated before, this European utopia can’t be anywhere in Europe, as Bujar’s home country, Albania, is displayed in a completely opposite light, in a state of political ruin. To escape the dystopian setting, Albanians were “fleeing the Serbian aggression and heading for neighbouring countries and Western Europe.” (Statovci 43) They don’t even consider Albania within Europe, as it contrasted the epicurean image of the carnivalesque, calling it “the black spot” of Europe. (51) As a result, Bujar’s crossing ensues, in hopes of a better life and to live through the reversal of masquerading. This is also prevalent in Highsmith’s novel, where Tom Ripley travels to Europe by taking “a leap” towards endless possibilities. (8) During the time of the novel in the 1950s, Tom Ripley was suffering in poverty in post-Cold War America, and a life in Europe seemed like a blessing to him. Both characters leave their home country in pursuit of the European masquerade, where their marginalised identities can flourish, however concealed and altered they become.

Italy has cultivated its legacy of carnivals since the Renaissance period, as it became a symbol of ecstatic and artistic rendezvous. Anticipating an extravagant and Dionysian life ahead, Tom Ripley sails to Italy at Mr Greenleaf's instruction. He already had a predetermined opinion of the lavish lifestyle in Italy, thinking Dickie was probably "having the time of his life over there. An income, a house, a boat. Why should he want to come back?" (Highsmith 6). Unlike the turmoil-ridden post-Cold War America, the Europe Dickie escapes to is not broken, but an ideal paradise in which he is free to do whatever he wants, not what he is bound to. This belief or mental expectation resonates with the representation of the European masquerade, as it hosts a symbolic opposition between natural and supernatural, self and other (Tseëlon 29). Europe is portrayed as the Other in a juxtaposition that bears some resemblance to Edward Said's concept of exoticism. In both Highsmith's and Statovci's novels, the romanticised ideologies bleed through the characters' own understanding. Tom sets foot in Italy with these fantastic notions in mind, and in the same Italy, Bujar arrives several decades later. The intrigue of the location is scattered across the two novels, for example, when Mr Maloof enthusiastically says to Tom, "That's what Venice is for--a good time!" (Highsmith 249). Or when Bujar describes Europe as the "forefront of humanity" (Statovci 116). The 'otherness' of these spaces allows Tom and Bujar to adopt their masks more effectively, as they can mould their identities at will. The reason why Tom could feel more self-assured was that in Italy or anywhere in Europe, he had the liberty of being whoever he wanted, wearing Dickie's identity. Due to his self-loathing, he associates Tom Ripley as someone insignificant and being able to bury that identity gives him the freedom to turn into someone important. At some point, he feels so fearless that he doesn't care if the police capture him while moving from Venice to Greece:

He had decided in Venice to make his voyage to Greece a heroic one. He would see the islands, swimming for the first time into his view, as a living, breathing, courageous individual—not as a cringing little nobody from Boston. (Highsmith 273)

Even his phobia of the water becomes easily disposable when he flees to the carnivalesque, where no one recognises him as Tom Ripley. Ripley is an awkward, working-class, non-heterosexual man who isn't considered ideal in social standards. However, when he is in Europe, he can erase those categories of himself, shifting into an identity he desires, which elevates him at the top of the hierarchy. From being a “cringing nobody”, his role is reversed into a “courageous” and respectable man.

Subsequently, Bujar seeks political asylum in Italy after he illegally crosses the border from Albania, using his marginalised identity as a vehicle of sympathy in order to obtain residence in the foreign country. He states:

When I first arrived in Italy, I looked for a police station and told the authorities that I belonged to a sexual minority and that, for this reason, I could not return to my homeland. They beat me, I said. I'm homosexual, it's very hard, and I'm very scared, I continued, because I knew this was my ticket into the country. (Statovci 69)

Using the art of persuasion and disguise, Bujar effectively gains the border authority's sympathy and is allowed to stay at the refugee camps in his early days in Europe. He uses his masquerade according to the situation, using his “homosexual” identity to reveal and conceal parts of his own nature. Later on, when he moves to Spain, he gets used to being a heterosexual man having a lover named Rosa, with whom he doesn't “mind having sex” (Statovci 83). He leads a carefree and buoyant life through masquerading, exercising his libidinous freedom as well as the

multitude of identities. Through Bujar's capricious journey, Statovci not only paints the carnivalesque side of Europe, but at the same time reveals that not everything about it is as it seems. Behind the picturesque scene, there lies a darker reality. The rose coloured glasses that Bujar wore when he first arrived in Italy were shattered after years of living. He expected people to love him and see his potential through the several masks he wore, and he would have a successful career. Instead, he was met with indifference and realised that this life was "not significantly better than the one I had left behind." (Statovci 12)

2. 6 Masquerade As A Weapon For Crime:

At the core of masquerading, disguise is a fundamental and consistent aspect, which can also be turned to a sinister dimension. While it reveals and conceals parts of one's identity, it can be used for deception and trickery. The wearer might get too comfortable with the guarding it provides and feel themselves "invincible" in its enigmatic power, as Bujar reflects in front of a mirror (Statovci 66). Protected by anonymity, the masquerade, however metaphoric, is used as a weapon for committing crimes in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*. As Tseëlon pens, "a cloak of anonymity can provide the scene for staging petty crimes, as was indeed the case in eighteenth-century masquerades, especially in the darker alleys of the pleasure gardens where the balls were held." (30) It is unsurprising to see atrocious crimes being carried out by masked individuals, as it removes personal responsibility while removing personal identifications (Zimbardo, 1969, qtd. in Tseëlon 31). In eschewing personal responsibility, these individuals depart from their personal morals, resulting in corruption.

For Tom Ripley, deception is easier than being sincere, as his treacherous tendencies are in abundance. He uses masking in his tax scheme as McAlpin, and later on, his petty crimes turn

into felonies as he murders Dickie. To cover for a lie, one must make a bigger lie, and in a similar fashion, one murder invites another. He kills Freddie Miles, Dickie's friend, who had found out about his impersonation of Dickie. Seconds before he strikes him with a heavy ashtray, Tom considers, "Wasn't there another way out?" (Highsmith 141), but before he could think, he carried out the murder. Because of the cloak of the masquerade, Tom commits crimes without thinking of the consequences. While disposing of the body, there is a moment of guilt in him, knowing how unfair it is to Miles, but it is soon replaced by the hatred he feels towards Dickie's friend (141-144). It proves Tseïlon's claims that facelessness or anonymity can wash away a person's morals (31). In this sense, a masquerade can be a double-edged sword, serving as a protection while simultaneously being a weapon for crimes.

Crossing doesn't showcase crimes as conspicuously; rather, Bujar passively or accidentally ends up contributing to taking the lives of the people he cares about. One of his biggest traumas is the death of Agim, which Statovci keeps at an all-time backdrop of the novel until its very end. He never intended to kill Agim when they were sailing on a small boat to Italy; pushing him off the boat was a traumatic response to Agim's advances. However, when he recalls Agim's cry for help, he pretends "not to hear as he cries out my name in terror" (217). He seeks refuge in the darkness that shrouds them, shielding away from personal responsibility. Moreover, Bujar's spiteful breakup with Tanja leads her to take her own life. His actions tangentially represent how masking can cause moral decay, deception and menace. As someone who has attempted suicide himself, there is an obvious lack of empathy when he tells her, "I don't love you anymore," despite her desperate pleas for him to stay. He denies her simply because he was denied *being her* in the course of masking as Tanja at the singing competition

(210). Masquerade is a measure of power that Bujar adheres to himself, and through the wrong exercise of this power, he unequivocally causes Tanja's death.

Chapter 3

Performative Identity: The ‘chameleons’ of *Crossing* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

The contents of this chapter explore the performative identities of Ripley and Bujar as they take on social roles to not only fit in but also exploit these roles in different settings. Building on Ervin Goffman’s theory of performance in everyday life, this chapter elaborates the characters’ enactment through social interactions. Furthermore, this chapter will also look into the chameleon effect postulated by Chartrand and Bargh, noting how the characters foster both nonconscious and conscious mimicry of the postures, mannerisms, and behaviours of their interaction partners.

The existence of masks breeds grounds for performance. In understanding masquerade and its relation to identity, Tseëlon draws her theory from Goffman’s dramaturgical model of performance. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* proposes to look at life as a theatre, where individuals of society carry out “roles” for their individual performance. While a masquerade is an individualist tool, Goffman’s theory is based on social interactions and performances. This performative model erases the space between the ‘person’ and the ‘act’, as doing turns into being. In Tseëlon’s words, “the act becomes part of the stylistic device that produces the substance: performance is identity” (10). In the presence of an audience, there are two kinds of impressions conceived by the actor: “the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off” (Goffman 2). The first can be observed through verbal symbols and gesticulations, while the second is reliant on actions that are symptomatic of the actor.

Tracing these impressions in Ripley’s character, the expression he gives and gives off is dependent on the timeline of the novel. The expressions he gives as Tom Ripley are his physical

attributes, his light brown hair and “world’s dullest face” (31), and the expressions he gives off are clumsy, timid and unimpressive. However, when he acts as Dickie, his appearances are altered in order to fit the role, his lighter hair “affected by the sun” (130), because Dickie had dirty blonde hair. He gives off “naive, good-natured, upright” characteristics under the latter guise. Comparably, in *Crossing*, Bujar defies the consistency of impression by changing how his actor gives and gives off are unrecognisable. He could be a man or a woman or something in between in the appearance he gives, while symptomatic actions reflect on whichever roles he plays, whether it's Adam or Anastasia, or whomever (Statovci 7-8).

For a better understanding of the concepts, Goffman offers essential categories in this research: interaction, performance and routine. This analysis focuses on these categories as they are reflected in the characters Tom and Bujar. According to Goffman, interaction is “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence” (15). And performance refers to the activity during interaction, which can influence other participants in any way. Meanwhile, routine or part describes the behavioural patterns that are adjacent to the “rights and duties attached to a given status” (16).

Highsmith incorporates the social cues and interactions that Tom Ripley has with others, both as himself and Dickie. Meanwhile, Bujar’s performance is adjacent to how he interacts, while his interactions are according to the specific role he plays—which is never constant with the way he changes everything about himself. For example, when he is Ariana, he interacts with the classmates of his writing class through the performance of the role of Ariana. He does what Ariana would do in social scenarios, a persona that is entirely fictional. However, in the eyes of the “observers”, Ariana is an active participant of social performance, or rather, the “actor”. The

paradox of performative identity functions in a way that Bujar performs to perform in the given status.

Goffman postulates the different phases, such as front stage and backstage, where the performances happen. The “front” comprises the personal elements and designations of the actors. These elements are dependent on social interactions, as they can be scenic or personal appearances. Personal elements of the actor's front are components of physical appearance, manner of speech, accent, mannerisms, etc. On the other hand, “back” stage means when the actors retire to their own personal space, where they no longer need to perform a certain way. The front is grounds for assimilation and maintaining social and interpersonal identity, which Goffman elucidates as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (22).

For Tom Ripley, his “front” as Dickie occurs by dyeing his hair like Dickie’s and drawing on his eyebrows, and wearing the clothes that once belonged to Dickie. He also adopts Dickie’s mannerisms, the “rhythm of his Italian accent”, to efficiently keep up to this front. He completely immerses in the role, so seamlessly that he almost forgets what being Tom Ripley is like. Highsmith writes:

The main thing about impersonation, Tom thought, was to maintain the mood and temperament of the person one was impersonating, and to assume the facial expressions that went with them. The rest fell into place. (Highsmith 130)

Tom skillfully maintains the mask of Dickie as his “front”; his performance is affixed to his role so much that the observers don’t question its authenticity. Once he retires to the back stage, he becomes Tom Ripley, yet even then, he is cautious of his own movements as if he were on stage.

For Bujar, his “front” is in accordance with “setting”, as he takes on different identities throughout the novel. In Germany, he is Ariana, as he dresses up as a woman to fit in that role. Afterwards, when he moves to Spain, he is a heterosexual man, as he assumes the heteronormative norms of masculinity. Subsequently, in Finland, he appropriates Tanja’s identity as a transwoman to get on a literal stage in a singing competition, which, in hindsight, resonates with Goffman’s front and back stage. When he goes back home after the audition, he retires to the “back” stage as Bujar. Tanja is unaware of this performance, and Goffman posits that the inability to see the team's performance while outside is called “audience segregation”. This phenomenon suggests particular performances are presented to particular audiences, enabling the team to create the ideal front for each audience's needs (137).

Goffman’s module proffers two types of actors that govern their performance based on beliefs. He presents the “sincere and cynical” categorically to make a clear distinction between the performers. The sincere individual preserves their identity and beliefs of identity to their front, making their performance more authentic and candid. Conversely, the cynical individuals manipulate their roles at their will. They don't necessarily identify with the roles they play, nor do they express their beliefs; they perform the specific roles in order to seek out other means. Needless to say, Bujar and Tom fit in the cynical category, as their performances contradict their “back” stages. Bujar sometimes plays the role of a girl, but he doesn't identify as a girl. He confirms it in the quote, “I don't dress in girls’ clothes in order to be a girl, but to have the same advantage as girls” (Statovci 176). Tom’s cynicism is exhibited forthrightly, as his impersonation of Dickie is the centre piece of the novel. Performing Dickie’s role gave his “existence a peculiar, delicious atmosphere of purity, like that, Tom thought, which a fine actor probably feels when he

plays an important role on a stage with the conviction that the role he is playing could not be played better by anyone else. He was himself—and yet not himself” (Highsmith 135).

Here, it can be noted that performance doesn't entirely take away factors of self and identity. As Goffman informs, “the self is a product of all of these arrangements, and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis” (253). He elaborates on this by saying that whether the performers feel their act closer to reality or not, it is true that they express a surreptitious expression to multiple versions of reality, each version tending to be incompatible with the others” (207). In this sense, the multiplicity of Tom and Bujar’s identities is expressed through these performances and interpersonal interactions, where performance becomes identity. These notions are related to Tseëlon’s philosophy of masquerading, as disguise or performance conveys multiple versions of the self.

3.1 The Chameleon Effect: Tom Ripley and Bujar’s nonconscious mimicry

The shape-shifting nature of Ripley and Bujar resembles that of a chameleon, a creature that changes its colour depending on where it lands. Chartrand and Bargh’s (1999) influential research, “The Chameleon Effect: Perception Link and Social Interaction,” inaugurates the nonconscious mimicry of postures, behavioural patterns, bodily and facial expressions, and mannerisms amongst individuals through social interactions. Instead of deliberate imitation like the monkey metaphor “to ape”, the chameleon effect is a psychological experiment that proves how individuals adopt behaviours of their interaction partners unconsciously. According to the study, it is a response to perception, as the act of perceiving another person’s behaviour creates “a tendency to behave similarly oneself” (Chartrand and Bargh 893). Understanding the perception-behaviour link, this mimicry occurs in a two-step process. Firstly, when the behaviour

of another person is observed, it activates an “automatic interpretation” of social representation. This interpretation leads to correspondence of said behaviour, resulting in nonconscious mimicry. While most of the mimicry and masking in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing* conforms to deliberate and conscious performance, there are a few instances where Ripley and Bujar mimic others unconsciously. The reason behind this nonconscious phenomenon, as Chartrand and Bargh conclude, is to create a “social glue” between interaction partners. They state that the chameleon effect makes social interactions smoother and strengthens interpersonal bonds (897).

The chameleon effect takes on a convoluted dimension when it is implemented in Ripley’s behaviours, whose nature is forgery. Ripley’s greatest talent is mimicry, and for the most part, it is a deliberate choice. His mimicry of Dickie is taken to an extreme as it turns into complete appropriation. Nonetheless, there are moments where the chameleon effect sets off in his behaviour, as he likes Dickie obsessively. Likeability is a key factor in psychological studies, as the experiments show that participants are likely to mimic those whom they like. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom mimics Dickie’s mannerisms as he “walked in his slouching, downhill gait that made his bony knees jut out in front of him, a gait that Tom had unconsciously adopted, too” (Highsmith 73). Tom’s perception of minuscule details of himself and others might seem obsessive, but it later proves to be a tool as he engages in chameleon-like changes of identity and appearance (Kerley 18). Furthermore, he imitates Peter’s mannerisms and “his way of jerking his head to one side as he talked” (269). It is an unconscious mode of communication, as Chartrand and Bargh’s explain with the sentiment of “I feel as you do” to their interaction partner (901).

Statovci builds Bujar’s character with a propensity to belong somewhere, anywhere at all, as long as he can flee from his past trauma. Yet, his unresolved trauma is perpetually present in

his unconsciousness, and as a result, a lot of his actions stem from his unconscious mind. Bujar's inclination to fit in society engenders his behaviour-perception link is activated, as he adopts the mannerisms, accents and expressions from whatever environment he surrounds himself with. These adoptive behaviours are both conscious and nonconscious. Through his mimicry, he gains a "copy of their life" (11), in pursuit of social acceptance. The chameleon effect takes off in a scene where he's adopting nonconscious mimicry of Maria's movements by "separating my clothes into different machines, almost mimicking her movements" (91). Furthermore, Bujar is constantly and unconsciously mimicking Agim's behaviours and expressions through the many faces he sports. It is a way of trying to communicate with the person that meant the world to him, as the chameleon effect offsets as a tool for communication that conveys "I am like you" (Chartrand and Bargh 901).

Regardless of consciousness or the lack thereof, it is evident that Ripley and Bujar utilise the essence of their chameleon-like identity to communicate with others. Ultimately, they both manage to build rapport in the social atmosphere as chameleons.

Chapter 4

Ambiguity In Gender And Sexual Expression:

Ambiguity plays a substantial role in constructing, or rather, deconstructing the orthodox ideas into literature. It shows, without telling, treading over the fine lines between truth and obscurity. This ambiguity can be channelled in ambiguous storytelling, as Reginald Hill remarks that Highsmith's work "leaves you uncomfortably uncertain of what you feel, whom you sympathize with" (Hill 454, qtd. in Prigot 24). Whether morally ambiguous or having an ambiguous sexual orientation, it raises questions that never provide an absolute answer. The theme of ambiguity in gender and sexuality is prevalent in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*, as the authors enable sufficient room for discussion regarding 'queerness' or 'deviancy' of these characters. In this chapter, the ambiguity and fluidity of Ripley and Bujar as queer individuals will be analysed through Butler's gender performativity, as well as relevant research on queer identity.

To define what queer is, Annamarie Jagose emphasises that queerness is not restricted to one's identity or interpersonal relationships. Instead, "queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability--which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect--queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire" (Jagose 3, qtd. in Prigot 34). By that definition, both Ripley and Bujar are queer individuals and therefore are deviants. Although Ripley's queerness relies on subtleties, as Highsmith never straightforwardly states his sexuality, Bujar is unapologetically and conspicuously queer and gender non-conforming, as he commits to no labels. Statovci cleverly makes Agim the voice of reason when raising this question: "Do you realize how narrow-minded

it is to think that there are only two genders in the world, two types of people, men and women?”
(27)

Judith Butler challenges the binary code of gender roles and sexuality in their book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, where they label gender as performative. This notion of performance is reminiscent of Goffman’s theory, as she employs a Goffmanian model to redefine gender. Instead of directing her focus on society, they state, “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (34). Butler views that if gender is a social construct, it is not gender that is being constructed by people, but people are instead the ones who are being constructed. Moreover, they also consult about the ambiguity of gender expression, a “perpetual displacement” comprising “a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization” (p. 176). Butler’s theory contradicts the heteronormative and binary notions of gender and gender roles, which are inherently linked to a person’s biological sex. A crucial element of gender performativity, according to Butler, is the repetition of the actions carried out. Butler provides another analogy, “a ritualized production” (Butler 60). Assume that certain activities are repeated. If a large number of young boys begin sporting dresses tomorrow and continue to do so for years, our impression of what is suitable for them to wear will change over time.

Tom Ripley’s ambiguity challenges the binary norms of Cold War America, where there is a clear distinction between right and wrong, normal and deviant (Prigot 25). During the 1950s, there were clear standards of normalcy—being an upper-class, heterosexual man with a strong sense of righteousness. Highsmith defies that binary by giving life to Tom Ripley, a queer man

with no fixed job, and on top of that, a deviant with criminal tendencies. Despite these attributes, Highsmith manages to lure the readers into the “seduction of deviancy” through the ambiguity of his identity (Prigot 22). While Tom vehemently denies being queer whenever he’s confronted by Dickie (76), Highsmith infuses his character with blatant indicators of his queer identity. For example, his strong attraction towards Dickie Greenleaf, and he makes it his ambition to be reciprocated, stating “the first step” of his endeavours was “to make Dickie like him. That he wanted more than anything else in the world” (Highsmith 45). Tom’s sexual indeterminacy and performance are essential to his character, the only constancy Highsmith keeps throughout the book (Prigot 23). Because of the gender roles and performativity Butler mentions, Tom refuses to accept his queer side, as it goes against the binary construction of heteronormative society. He wants to appear ‘normal’, so he performs a heterosexual role even when he is Tom Ripley. Despite this, his queer side slips out of his performance, and he feels a “sharp thrust of shame” when Dickie indirectly calls him out by using a quote from Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” (96). Tom’s shame can be traced in Davies’ discourse on the stigma of “illegitimates” or homosexual minorities, who bear “discreditable social stigma that had to be concealed from most of a person’s associates” (2). Tom’s ambiguous sexuality is displayed in a scene not long before he murders Dickie, where the two were riding together on the motorboat, as he thinks “he could have hit Dickie, sprung on him, or kissed him, or thrown him overboard, and nobody would have seen him at this distance” (Highsmith 103). It reveals his depraved and queer nature in a unique mixture. During the scene of murder, Highsmith writes:

Tom glanced at the land. San Remo was a blur of chalky white and pink. He picked up the oar, as casually as if he were playing with it between his knees, and when Dickie was

shoving his trousers down, Tom lifted the oar and came down with it on the top of Dickie's head. (Highsmith 104)

The scene purposefully alluded to phallic imagery, a twisted way of showing Tom's sexual attraction towards Dickie, whom he was in the process of assassinating. Tom's obsession with wanting power over Dickie can be traced to Foucault's concept of sexuality and power, as he equates autonomy of power to sexual deviancy (Foucault, 1890). Although these instances tell about Tom's sexuality and desire for Dickie, there is no actual indication of sex, nor does he get into a relationship with anyone, man or woman. For that reason, Shannon calls him a fetishist, as he finds great appeal in possessions, for his "ecstatic moment when he thought of the pleasures that lay before him now with Dickie's money, other beds, tables, seas, ships, suitcases, shirts, years of freedom, years of pleasure. Then he turned the light out and put his head down and almost at once fell asleep, happy, content, and utterly, utterly confident, as he had never been in his life" (112). However, it is clear that Tom romanticises these items because they belong to Dickie, like the "beautiful silver lighter" or the signature rings. It is not the items as they are, but the quality they possess. Refuting Shannon's claims, Prigot refers to Ripley as a "sensualist with homosexual feelings" (34), which is more a suitable attribute to his character. Nevertheless, the ambiguity in his queer identity is unrefutable. His deviancy is a means of freedom; those who encounter their inner deviant or queer should be considered "liberated, even if this does not always end happily" (Prigot 4).

Another giveaway of his queer identity is his hatred towards Marge, Dickie's female friend and admirer. When Marge and Dickie kiss, he doesn't look away, watching them like a voyeur while getting repulsed by "the big bulge of her behind in the peasant skirt below Dickie's

arm that circled her waist” (77). His ambiguous sexuality is questioned by Freddie Miles, to which he laughs to himself while disposing of Freddie’s dead body. He asks, “Where was the sex? Where was the deviation? He looked at Freddie and said low and bitterly: ‘Freddie Miles, you’re a victim of your own dirty mind’” (141).

To define Bujar’s queer identity is to limit. He embodies ambiguity in terms of gender and sexual expression as Statovci challenges the binary order of social constructs. According to Butler, “identity is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality” (23). They make sure to make clear distinctions between the three, and gender itself is unstable and performative. Bujar’s sex and ever-changing gender are narrated early on in the novel, as he says, “I am a man who cannot be a woman but who can sometimes look like a woman” (Statovci 8). It is his “greatest quality” to appear as whatever gender he pleases. He adheres to the non-conformity of gender when he says, “I’m under no obligation to reveal my gender to anybody, that what people think they know about me isn’t my responsibility but their own construction, their own assumption” (92). Statovci uses Bujar’s fluidity and the status of gender expression to deconstruct the rigid categories of identity. It corresponds with Eliade’s views on dealing with otherness. According to Eliade, ambiguity defies order and inspires a lack of commitment, hovering in a space between belonging and not belonging (5). Bujar constantly changes his gender simply “by opening [my] mouth” (9), which caters to the performativity of gender.

Bujar’s sexuality is as fluid as his gender identity; his attraction towards anyone is not limited to a particular gender. In the earlier years of his life, he refused his queer identity, growing up in a traditional Albanian family that reinforced heteronormativity and binary norms

of gender. His father would recite Albanian myths and folklore to him, which contained glorified stories of “Albanian men’s honour”. And offending the honour is the greatest sin (Statovci 34). Because of his conservative upbringing, Bujar refuses to be considered as “peder”, an Albanian slang term for homosexuals. He asks Agim, “Are you... *peder*? [...] It doesn’t matter if you are, but I’m not. You know that, don’t you? Though we sometimes do...those things in the evenings” (132). It implies that the two share sexual intimacy, yet Bujar denies being a homosexual because of the stigma and fear of being ostracised by society. In response to Bujar’s question, Agim utters that “a girl can’t be a *peder*”, hinting that Agim was a girl stuck in a boy’s body. Perhaps it’s one of the reasons why several years later, Bujar gets in a relationship with Tanja, a transgender woman who is “incomplete and still on her way to achieving her final form” (172), because she reminds him of Agim. Bujar is faced with the same question of his ambiguous sexuality when Tanja asks him, “Are you... gay?” This time, he embraces his queer identity, replying, “Yes, among other things” (172-173). Gender identity, according to Butler, does not come before gendered actions. It appears that gender identity and gendered acts coexist. Gender identity is always being formed by gendered behaviours. It is clear from Butler’s remarks that gender identity is unstable (Butler xvi). Bujar’s gender identity is unstable and inconsistent, which suggests the fluidity of his gender expression. As Statovci pens:

Why can’t you simply decide to be a man or a woman by wearing men’s or women’s clothing? Why can’t everybody present themselves the way they want to? If I want to use a woman’s name or a foreign name, I can simply say so and nobody will ask me to prove why. (Statovci 175)

Butler defines gender identity as "a compelling illusion, an object of belief" that is retrospectively constructed by one's performance (520), which Bujar exhibits through various performances of gender identities. Butler, however, doesn't support the continuous fluidity of gender because it might endorse traditional heteronormative principles of gender identity. For instance, when Bujar changes his gender from man to woman, he is essentially vacillating from masculinity to femininity. He acts like a "man" when he is wearing clothes that attribute to the construct of a man, while he wears feminine clothes to create the illusion of a woman. His feminine behaviour is brought out when he is pretending to be a woman. While presenting as a woman, men on the streets cat-call him, which bring out the "man inside him" as he "curses at them in a low, gruff voice, and at that they shut up and raise their hands into the air as though they have come face-to-face with a challenger of equal stature" (Statovci 8).

Chapter 5

Consequences: *The End of a Beginning?*

Reading *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing* side by side, the existing parallels are indisputable, regardless of what section of the bookshelf they occupy. There are similarities as well as differences between these two postmodern literary works, which can be assessed throughout this research. Rather than pertaining to any theoretical lens, this particular chapter will look into parallels and contrasts between Highsmith and Statovci's works, as well as scrutinise the consequences after the masquerade and performative identities.

The major parallels of these two novels are the most crucial scenes that transpire on the boats, the first element of inspiration for this research. On the boat, the characters Ripley and Bujar lose their past selves through the death of Dickie and Agim, who once were the centre of their worlds. The difference, however, is that Dickie's death was a premeditated murder that stemmed from greed and rage, whilst Agim's was all but a devastating accident. Although Tom had an obvious attraction towards Dickie, the outward rejection contaminated the passion he had for Dickie and turned it into a morbid ambition to steal his identity. Meanwhile, Bujar makes up for the loss of Agim by infusing their identities into a distorted amalgamation. One of the key differences between Tom and Bujar's characters is remorse—which the former lacks, and the latter drowns himself in survivor's guilt. Since identity is the backbone of this research, and as identity is often called a "state of being and becoming," Bujar and Ripley's process never arrives as they never mentally leave the 'boat'. Trauma and disjointed self thwarted the process, resulting in them seeking out means for reinvention: the masquerade.

What makes the novels strikingly similar and contrastingly dissimilar is the ending. The parallels of the two worlds come to an end as the characters bear the consequences of their

actions differently. Statovci ends his book in a full circle, by returning to where it all started, as Bujar returns to Albania, his homeland, despite vehemently denying his place of origin and past identity in earlier chapters, where he states, “I am French or German or Greek, but never Albanian” (Statovci 7). He comes to terms with his trauma and faces the reality that surrounds him, accepting the fragmented self that he has become. Conversely, Tom Ripley gets away with the murders and masquerades with no repercussions, and on top of that, gets Dickie’s inheritance through the ‘suicide note’ he himself wrote as Dickie Greenleaf.

5.1 Tom Ripley’s Triumph

At the end of the novel, as Tom thinks he’s going to be arrested once he gets to Greece, instead of the police, he is ushered by a taxi driver who asks where he would like to go, to which he says, “Il meglio albergo. Il meglio, il meglio!” (Highsmith 285). It is Highsmith’s way of shooting down the orthodox ending that is expected for a deviant like Tom, to be put behind bars. He revels in his masquerade, the caricature of himself, achieving that “blank slate” without looking back into his unresolved trauma. However, despite getting what he truly wanted, there is an undeniable loneliness that came with his masking. As the novel goes:

He would have to keep a distance from people, always. He might acquire the different standards and habits, but he could never acquire the circle of friends—not unless he went to Istanbul or Ceylon, and what was the use of acquiring the kind of people he would meet in those places? He was alone, and it was a lonely game he was playing. (Highsmith 180)

Even though he didn't care for loneliness at first, thinking it was “impossible to be lonely” when he could have all Dickie’s possessions and status, it becomes clear that alienation comes with the

string of lies. In Goffman's words, Ripley maintains an all-time "mystification", the distance between actor and audience, to maintain his performance (67). Although he is triumphant in his endeavours, the masquerade for Ripley results in dreadful alienation.

5.2 Bujar's Atonement

The constant survivor's guilt haunts Bujar like a ghost, and this ghost is called Agim. No matter what face or name he takes, there is a perpetual emptiness inside him. He finally accepts the fact that his yearning to belong originates from the absence he feels without Agim. Statovci writes:

For tonight I will dream of him, his face, his touch, the kindness of his heart; I know it, because he has been with me these last few days, more present than for a long time, and I've tried to push him away, shut him behind the window like a ghost, [...] I'm afraid of how I'm still trying to keep him alive. (Statovci 158)

The act of keeping Agim alive is similar to the "ghostly" presence of trauma. Bujar journeys back to the streets of Tirana, walks the same path he had during his childhood, only to realise the city hasn't changed much. The revisitation of his past allows him to recollect pieces of fragmented memory, as Caruth states, a response to traumatic events that transpired. He reconciles with his former self, even though it cannot be attained, he realises the "hopelessness of the past" while embracing the "unpredictability of the future". Once the mask comes off, the stage becomes lost, and the chameleon loses all its colours; he is but a distorted version of multiple faces and names. He is burdened with guilt and shame, not only because of the murder of Agim, but also for the cause of Tanja's suicide. Nonetheless, he attempts to make amends, but

the price of atonement is going back home and facing his trauma. Acknowledging the existence of trauma is the first step toward healing. Although Caruth argues that trauma is an indelible void that cannot be completely “claimed” or “healed”, it can be gradually transformed into “transmissible historical experience” with coherent narratives. Much like trauma itself, the recovery is not linear healing but learning to coexist with fragmentation. Bujar’s attempt to confront his traumatic memories and return to his past life is a step stool in reclaiming his “self”. He takes care of his mother, who couldn’t recognise him due to dementia, but she remembers the son he had named Bujar. It is as though Statovci demonstrates the inescapable part of one’s self, even after loss and transgressions. The loss of his beloved Agim, which ultimately causes the loss of himself, is revealed through a symbolic horse: “And in the morning my beloved appears as a horse beside my bed, like a gigantic, gnarled hunk of meat” (Statovci 216).

This horse, as though it appears to be one entity, depicts three different people he had lost. At first, it was his father, then it was his best friend and beloved, Agim, and at last, it embodies Bujar himself. After decades of unresolved trauma and masquerading as a coping mechanism, he can’t even face the people of his past as they are, including himself. They materialise as a fictitious creature that allows him to separate himself and his experiences. According to Caruth, it is not a pathological falsehood to recount events unusually, but it is history itself (5). Through communicating with his trauma of losing Agim and facing the distorted “truth”, Statovci concludes the novel in a bittersweet rumination.

The contrasting endings of the novels and the characters mark the end of the chapters of their lives as both Ripley and Bujar embark on a new journey of their masked and unmasked identities. It is an end for a new beginning, and at the same time, an end of their past selves that may seem completely eradicated, but fragments of them continue to persist.

Conclusion

Identity has been, and always will be, one of the most prominent subjects that stirs extensive discourse. Between wanting to define and wanting to disguise our identities, there is endless research that allows a better understanding of identity. The paradox of masquerading lies between the two, weaving its way as a means of self-expression. Akin, wearing someone's skin, a mask can become a perpetual part of a person. The characters Ripley and Bujar use masquerade as a façade and a tool for their deconstructed identity. Thus, this thesis answers the questions surrounding their masquerading: what causes them to fracture their identities, why, when and how they put on these masks as they perform different identities. The trauma Ripley and Bujar go through during their childhood and adult life dismantles their idea of themselves, even though the traumatic experiences repeatedly appear as fragmented narratives. They cope with these traumas by replicating other people—Tom becomes Dickie, while Bujar constantly changes identities—because they no longer want to associate with their previous identity. The facets of masquerading are explored in this study, the elements that work actively to effectuate their performances as marginalised queer individuals. Both inanimate objects and mannerisms help them maintain masking, while the utopian setting enables the performance. These performances can be based on everyday life or gendered as Bujar and Ripley interact with the other society. By shedding light on trauma, identity, masquerading, performance and gender queer performativity, this research undertakes an in-depth exploration of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks with textual evidence and a close reading of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Crossing*. The core of the research is understanding how individuals can wear metaphorical masks and the flexible nature of identities, a phenomenon no different from fiction to reality.

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