



The Talented Mr. Ripley

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Since his debut in 1955, Tom Ripley has evolved into the ultimate bad boy sociopath, influencing countless novelists and filmmakers. In this first novel, we are introduced to suave, handsome Tom Ripley: a young striver, newly arrived in the heady world of Manhattan in the 1950s. A product of a broken home, branded a "sissy" by his dismissive Aunt Dottie, Ripley becomes enamored of the moneyed world of his new friend, Dickie Greenleaf. This fondness turns obsessive when Ripley is sent to Italy to bring back his libertine pal but grows enraged by Dickie's ambivalent feelings for Marge, a charming American dilettante. A dark reworking of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*—is up to his tricks in a 90s film and also Rene Clement's 60s film, "Purple Noon."

The Talented Mr. Ripley Details

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From Reader Review The Talented Mr. Ripley for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

When the 1999 film adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was released, I remember reading a lengthy magazine article that discussed all the things about the book that were changed for the movie. I don't remember now what any of those changes were, but I do remember that I came away from the article thinking the book didn't sound very good. Thus, even though I had a copy of it, I avoided reading it for years and years. In 2017 it finally occurred to me that the book wouldn't have the staying power it does if there weren't something to it. I finally gave it a try and was amazed by how absorbing it was. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is like an elaborate puzzle that Tom Ripley is constantly working, figuring out how to get himself into and out of treacherous situations entirely of his own making. While he's obviously some kind of psychopath, Ripley is also oddly sympathetic; Highsmith delves into his past and his psyche just enough to help the reader understand him, but thankfully without crossing over into sentimentality. It's a fantastic portrait, and I rooted for him the whole way through despite his pileup of bad deeds and appalling rationalizations. I truly loved every minute of this and was sorry when it was over. This isn't the kind of book I'm generally compelled to reach for, and I doubt I'll read any of the sequels. But I recognize perfection when I see it, and for what it sets out to do, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is just about perfect.

Candi says

"His stories were good because he imagined them intensely, so intensely that he came to believe them."

Tom Ripley has to be one of the most intriguing characters I've come across in a while – "talented", perhaps some would say so, but mostly conniving, obsessive, self-loathing, and quite lucky. Viewing everything from his perspective was fascinating and disturbing. I'm not sure if I was supposed to identify with him or not! I certainly never felt any empathy towards him, but at times, while not exactly rooting for him, I still felt as if I was placed in the position of a partner in his exploits. **The Talented Mr. Ripley** is an intense psychological thriller that builds to the peak of suspense a bit slowly and then erupts to a biting your nails, edge of your seat kind of pitch. I went into this book mostly unaware of the plot – I think this is the best way to enjoy this book. If you've seen the movie already or read too many descriptions of the story line, then I would imagine this would lessen the jolt you would otherwise experience. The vivid descriptions of Italy are captivating and I found myself wanting to visit this country even more earnestly than before. Having read the book, the movie will likely be less sensational; but the promise of being able to view the beautiful scenery on my television screen has me greatly anticipating watching this regardless. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in a classic and rather brilliant psychological thriller. I have deducted one star only due to the fact that I reached a point where I felt this became slightly unbelievable; however the entertainment value allows this to be just a very minor criticism of the book as a whole.

Aubrey says

First off, Mr. Tom Ripley is no sociopath. While he is skilled at social manipulation, this is not out of the need to hide the fact that he has no capacity for emotion. Judging by his frequent mood swings, he most

likely has some flavor of manic-depressive disorder. Now, with that out of the way, we can begin.

Identity is a tricky business. If it was anything but, I wouldn't have found this book nearly as fascinating as I did. Murder mysteries are not my cup of tea, and while the setting was delightful in its foreignness and experiencing the story from the culpable person's viewpoint was interesting in itself, these aspects would not have balanced out my lack of interest in the details of the plot.

Lucky for the book, one particular aspect of the narrator made the story much more engaging than it would have been without, one that is encompassed here:

Being Tom Ripley had one compensation, at least: it relieved his mind of guilt for the stupid, unnecessary murder of (view spoiler).

What a line! This narrator was guilty regardless of who he thinks he is, that much is sure. But somehow, the mental acrobatics that enabled him to line themselves up with a different identity, also absolved him in his mind of a murder! How was this accomplished? Did he actually believe that he was a different person at the time of the crime, and that both identity and its guilt are determined by a state of mind rather than physical form?

Sure. Why not? Don't we do that all the time? There are the extreme examples shown by criminals living out their sentence in jail, undergoing the equation of 'guilty man + x amount of years in jail = innocent man'. A change in a state of both being and mind that absolves one of guilt. Then there are the medium examples of getting married, having kids, modifying your identity through the addition of a new relationship that makes you someone's parent or spouse. Perhaps, in the case of marriage, absolving you of feeling guilt about having a child out of wedlock. And then you have the rather trivial examples of changing your appearance or acquiring a material object of some significance. How about a tattoo removal that also removes the feeling of guilt caused by a not so pristine past? Your identity shifts with all of these changes. It's not only a matter of who you are, but how long that who lasts.

Here's a personal example. A few months ago I was well on my way to getting a degree as a bioengineer. Nearly there, in fact. But things change, and today I am looking to forward to majoring in English. In essence, I killed Aubrey the bioengineer, appropriated their social status, mental capabilities, and physical form, and am now living out my life as Aubrey the English major, same in practically everything except for determined career path. Aubrey the bioengineer was feeling guilty about not having found a research lab position. Aubrey the English major has no use for such feelings. Not only had I done away with feelings of guilt, I had done it in such a way that I will never be convicted of a crime, because unlike Tom and his appropriated Dickey identity, all of this happened in my head. Strange way to think of it, isn't it.

Now, can you imagine Mr. Tom Ripley, master of social manipulation and integration into the selves of others, on the Internet? It'd take him a while to get used to the lack of body language and other visual cues, but he'd get the hang of it eventually. Would make for an interesting story, that.

William2.1 says

I've been dabbling in some of the classic thriller writers. Simenon and Sciascia, too. It is summer (in the northern hemisphere) after all.

The Talented Mr. Ripley will have you squirming in your seat. Tom Ripley is a man with champagne tastes and a beer pocket book. He possesses very low self-esteem, very little money and he is undoubtedly a closeted queer. He likes queers, likes to be among them, but doesn't like admitting to himself that this is so. Mr. Ripley's talent is an extraordinary gift for forgery, impersonation, mimicry and murder which with him become a form of self delusion. Add to this nerves of steel in the midst of interrogation, including the ability to formulate convincing fictions that is on a par with his creator, and you have the makings of more than a few hair-raising scenes.

Dickie Greenleaf is AWOL from his father's shipbuilding firm in New York City and living in Mongibello, Italy. Dickie's father tracks Tom Ripley down in a New York bar. For some reason, he thinks that Tom's friendship with his son was consequential in a way it never was. Mr. Greenleaf offers to cover Tom's costs if he will go to Italy and talk Dickie into returning home. Alas, Mama Greenleaf is dying of cancer.

Tom goes over, immediately becomes jealous of Marge, Dickie's lover. She repulses him in every way; women in general sicken him. Tom charms Dickie and moves in with him, estranging him from Marge. He is so in love with him and doesn't even know it. He is also very envious of Dicky's tremendous wealth and advantages. Tom begins to see a way in which he might subsume Dickie. So when Dickie intimates that Tom is queer, as he unquestionably is, Tom kills him with an oar in a motorboat then anchors his corpse to the sea floor.

Well, that's all you need to know to get started. What follows is a masquerade in which Tom switches places with Dickie and back again to foil the ever present polizia. A novel of plot and lots of fun. A real knucklebiter. Highly recommended.

Orsodimondo says

UN FALSO QUALCUNO PIUTTOSTO CHE UN AUTENTICO NESSUNO

New York anni Cinquanta.

Tom Ripley sbarca il lunario tra furtarelli e truffe. Un giorno conosce un ricco industriale che gli propone di pagarla per andare a recuperare il figlio in Italia, Dickie Greenleaf.

Dickie si è insediato sulla costiera amalfitana, a Mongibello, paesello d'invenzione.

Tra spiagge, barche, Venezia, Roma, la Liguria, la Grecia, si dipana un'intricata avventura, che è diventato un classico dei classici, almeno per me.

Un sogno, una proiezione, un miraggio, una favola suadente.

”Plein soleil-Delitto in pieno sole” di René Clément, 1960: Ripley è Alain Delon, l'amico Greenleaf è Maurice Ronet, la sua ragazza Marie Laforêt.

Ripley è un truffatore, ma anche assassino con pochi scrupoli, uno psicopatico che Highsmith trasforma nell'eroe di una saga in cinque romanzi, che ha ispirato più volte il cinema, e ha ispirato una quarantina d'anni della mia vita. Questo primo, e poi a seguire *Il sepolto vivo*, *L'amico americano*, *Il ragazzo di Tom Ripley* per finire con *Ripley sott'acqua*, usciti tra il 1955 e il 1991.

Tom appartiene alla schiera esigua degli eroi negativi (ben più numerosa quella di poliziotti e investigatori, di coloro che cercano e combattono il Male): Tom è il Male.

Ma è il Male necessario, quello indispensabile, giustificato, sempre raffinato ed elegante.

”L’amico americano” di Wim Wenders, 1977. Tom Ripley è Dennis Hopper. Ma il vero protagonista è il corniciaio interpretato da Bruno Ganz.

La sua vita sul confine include anche la sessualità: nonostante dal secondo romanzo, spiazzando il lettore, sia sposato a una bellissima francese, Héloïse, ci vuole poco a percepire che in Tom abiti un’omosessualità più o meno latente.

Highsmith non è mai esplicita e definita sull’argomento (come non lo fu nella sua personale vita: ha amato soprattutto donne, ma anche uomini, ed ebbe una storia con un gay), rimane reticente, allude, lascia aperta la porta all’obliquo, al mistero, come se mettere limiti, tracciare linee rigide in questa zona dell’essere togliesse linfa e gusto alla vita (è probabile che la stessa Highsmith abbia abbandonato gli USA proprio per il perbenismo sessuale dominante – molto più aperta e tollerante la Francia che la accolse, in seguito diventata Svizzera).

Il fatto è che Tom probabilmente preferisce la castità a una vita sessuale intensa, preferisce la fedeltà alla bigamia, vive di passioni, più che di pulsioni, più attratto dall’arte che dal corpo umano.

Non sorprende che Tom rimanga giovane nonostante gli anni passino, è una caratteristica della maggior parte degli eroi letterari, hanno un processo d’invecchiamento molto più rallentato rispetto al lettore.

”The Talend Mr Ripley-II talento di Mr Ripley” di Anthony Minghella, 1999. Matt Damon è Tom Ripley, Jude Law è Dickie Greeleaf, la sua ragazza è Gwyneth Paltrow.

Come mai piace così tanto al lettore, lo conquista, lo spinge a tifare per il suo successo anche quando uccide? Forse perché Ripley parte dai gradini bassi della società (orfano, istituti, una zia non proprio piacevole marchiano la sua infanzia) e arriva in alto grazie a forte personalità, impegno e determinazione, Highsmith riesce a inventare il villain che tutti vorremmo essere.

Gli omicidi sono, o sembrano, tutti casuali: Tom aveva un piano, davvero programmava quello che ha fatto? E se invece, ha seguito gli eventi, come riusciva sempre ad anticiparli? Come ha fatto a essere così bravo?

”Ripley’s Game-II gioco di Ripley” di Liliana Cavani, 2002. Con John Malkovich nel ruolo di Ripley, Dougray Scott e Lena Headey.

Qual è il vero talento di Tom Ripley?

La truffa? L’arte della menzogna?

L’amore per la vita? La ricerca del piacere?

La meravigliosa invidiabile assenza di colpa?

La mancanza di scrupoli?

L’assoluta assenza di morale?

È davvero colpevole dei suoi delitti, o non poteva fare altrimenti?

Highsmith costruisce la sua suspense a base di psicologia, con pagine dove sembra non succedere nulla, avvolgendo il lettore in una fitta trama di inquietudini, attese, astuzie.

”Ripley Under Ground-II ritorno di Ripley” di Roger Spottiswoode, 2005, dove ripley è Barry Pepper.

Melki says

I was not a big fan of Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*, so I wasn't really looking forward to tackling another of her novels. Fortunately, I had a much better experience with *Tom Ripley*. Oh, if only his other acquaintances could say the same . . .

Our story begins with Ripley being sent to Italy to talk Dickie Greenleaf, the prodigal son of a wealthy man, into coming home. The two guys hit it off, and spend some time bopping around Europe like two Ken dolls on holiday. But things turn ugly when Ripley senses his time as Dickie's favorite toy may be coming to an end.

Written in 1955, this one manages to stand the test of time, and still seems fresh and surprising. Highsmith featured her character Ripley in four more novels. This book has inspired two movies - 1960's *Purple Noon* and the 1999 version which starred ~~Howdy Doody~~ Matt Damon.

This is a damn fine thriller, and one of those make-you-feel-skeevy-rooting-for-the-bad-guy books. On the whole, I enjoyed it very much. My only complaint? One of the same problems I had with *Strangers on a Train*: how can a female writer create such bland and uninteresting female characters? No wonder no one wants to hang out with poor Marge. She's not only boring, she's annoying as hell. But . . . Ripley's the star of *this* show, and oh, how he shines. I *am* tempted to follow him into another book just to see what happens next.

The Talented Mr. Ripley is our January read in the *Pulp Fiction* group - <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...> There's still plenty of time if you'd like to join us for the discussion. Martinis and pernod are recommended.

Diane says

This classic novel of suspense lives up to the hype. I was familiar with the story of *Tom Ripley* because I had seen the Matt Damon movie, and the book was just as good as other readers had promised.

Ripley is skilled at manipulating people, lying, impersonations, con jobs and feigning interest in others. What terrifies him is 1) getting caught and 2) being himself. It's a classic case of someone who feels arrogant and snide toward others but who also hates himself and feels like he doesn't fit in anywhere, unless he's impersonating someone else.

In this first book in the Ripley series, he takes on the identity of Richard "Dickie" Greenleaf, who is a wealthy young man living in Italy. After living Dickie's life for several months, Ripley realizes he can't keep up the charade anymore because the police are looking for Dickie, and Tom has to revert to being himself again.

"This was the end of Dickie Greenleaf, he knew. He hated becoming Thomas Ripley again, hated being nobody, hated putting on his old set of habits again, and feeling that people looked down on him and were bored with him unless he put on an act for them like a clown, feeling incompetent and incapable of doing anything with himself except entertaining people for minutes at a time. He hated going back to himself as he would have hated putting on a shabby suit of clothes."

I looked up what else Patricia Highsmith wrote and discovered that she wrote the novel that the Hitchcock movie "Strangers on a Train" was based on. Clearly I need to read more Patricia Highsmith.

Bradley says

Honestly, I'm of two minds on this one.

The first is just how much fun I had running around with a trust fund buddy and the scam, enjoying 50's Italy, and especially the really delicious riffs from so many of the great authors doing their thing in the day, the subversion and the dark twist. I mean, we're all super-familiar with the heroic(anti-heroic) murderer protagonist, and some of us might be extremely familiar with it if they've read practically any mystery novels or watched ANY tv at all... but here it is, one of the first to really start the very popular modern mystery trend from the PoV of the sympathetic murderers. We'll ignore how much we love Richard the Third or the long line of True Crime novels or the Penny Dreadfuls, for now. This is the world of anti-hero worship, after all, thank you Dexter and Darth Vader. :)

So yeah, I had a really good time with this. I remember watching the movie and having a great time with it, too, in the theater. Little did I know that I was missing out on great books, too. :) I'm making up for lost time. :) Mistaken identities, con games, great play-acting, opportunity, and, of course, seeing the bad guys win. What's not to love?

And so I go to my second mind.

Closet homosexuality. This novel, with so many others of the time including movies, always made the bad guys homosexuals. This is trope made trope and it's as stale as it is insulting and almost entirely distasteful to modern readers, if it wasn't already so to people back then. I chose to read it as a buddy novel gone really wrong instead of thinly-veiled homosexuality, and I enjoyed it more, but the question still remains. I can write it off as a sign of the times or general ignorance or a cynical pandering to popular conceptions, or I can think again and be sad that such an otherwise interesting and cool novel should now be relegated to the back-shelf of history because of the implicit homophobia it exhibits, even if there was never an explicit hate comment.

I'm willing to be generous, though. One doesn't toss out decades of literature just because the societal norms of today have changed significantly from those of our grandparents or great grandparents. We twist our noses and complain of the stench, but we still enjoy what is GOOD about what we've just read. That's where I'm standing, anyway. :)

Paul Bryant says

Two reviews in one. First, the supercilious parody :

Tom : Oh Dickie, that shirt is so gorgeous. It's so you. Where did you get it?

Dick : You're not a fairy are you?

Tom: No! The very idea!

Dick: Well then, I got it from a divine little boutique near La Fontana della Barcaccia in Piazza di Spagna. We should go there tomorrow.

Tom : Oh Dickie, let's.

Marge (soliloquy) :

Dick is just *the* handsomest American 25 year old trust fund baby in all of Italy. Or this part of it, anyway. Sigh. I love him so much it makes my eyes slightly bulge. But however much I press my cleavage upon his upper parts, and hang my dripping undergarments within his vicinity, I just can't seem to get anywhere.

Tom (soliloquy) :

Dick is just *the* handsomest American 25 year old trust fund baby ever. Sigh. Why he wants to hang around with this gourd-shaped bitch I can't say. I really would like to wear all his clothes and pretend to be him for a day. No, make that *my entire life*.

Dick: Tom, for a creepy sociopath, you're quite good company. Let's go boating.

Tom: I don't know anything about small dangerously unstable motorboats in stretches of water with no other boat in sight, perfectly situated for a murder. How do you make it go?

Dick : You just pull on this here until you can feel it throbbing, then you grab that long thing there and steer it wherever you want. If it doesn't start you give it a good whack with an oar.

Tom : Well, if you say so.

review number 2

This interesting novel is, from a modern perspective, a bit iffy. Conforming to the 1950s stereotype, it elides homosexuality with deviant psychology and gives us a closet gay man* who is so much in love with this unavailable dreamboat - and the dreamboat's lifestyle - that he wants to be him. He creepily manipulates everyone around him and he despises every single human being he encounters, except the dreamboat. The 1950s was awash with sinister gay figures -

George Sanders in *All About Eve*

(and let us not forget Norman Mailer's 1954 essay "The Homosexual Villain" (he said about that time that he believed "there was an intrinsic relation between homosexuality and 'evil.' ").

The character of Tom Ripley is also self-loathing, another closeted-gay cliche. He loathes himself to the extent of wanting to shed his own personality like a snake's skin and become someone much better. I think that Tom Ripley therefore was part of the problem which led - to take one example from millions - to Lou Reed's parents making him have ECT to get rid of his homosexual tendencies.

Leaving the iffiness of this novel aside, it then suffers from the same thing as all other thrillers and crime novels - we are expecting murders, there's no suspense involved, one's only surprise is that Tom Ripley brains so few people. And also draining the interest away is that we know this was the first of a series of Ripley novels, so we know he won't die and probably therefore won't be caught, murder being a capital crime back then.

This novel is in the *1001 Books You Must Read Before Next Week Or Else* and I note it appears between *Lolita* and *Lord of the Rings*. Once again, poor little Lolita finds herself in some very dubious company.

*

*in the second Ripley book he gets married - might be worth reading that one to see what Patricia Highsmith thinks is going on with her character

Dan Schwent says

When Tom Ripley is offered a handsome reward to go to Italy to retrieve Dickie Greenleaf, he accepts and soon finds himself living the good life in Naples with Dickie. An obsession blooms and Tom finds himself wanting to be Dickie Greenleaf. But does he want to be Dickie Greenleaf enough to kill his new friend?

I was somewhat familiar with *The Talented Mr. Ripley* because I nearly took a girl to see the Matt Damon version in the theater back in the day. We opted to see *Dogma* instead. Anyway, I knew Highsmith wrote *Strangers on a Train* so I decided to take a crack at it.

The Talented Mr. Ripley is a tale of obsession, murder, lying, betrayal, and more lying. In short, it's a wholesome noir tale. Highsmith reads like a mannerly Jim Thompson, especially once things start going off the rails.

Tom Ripley is the protagonist but he's far from a hero. In fact, he's probably a sociopath. He doesn't seem to be comfortable in his own skin, preferring to live a lie than to be himself. He's a liar, thief, and eventually a murderer. Since there are more of these books, I'm guessing he continues his lying murdering impersonating ways.

The book is mostly the Tom Ripley show. Dickie and the rest of the supporting cast don't have much going on other than the way Ripley manipulates them. Actually, having never seen the movie, I was surprised at Dickie Greenleaf's fate considering I expected him and Tom to start making out at any moment. Did the movie have this big of a closeted gay vibe?

Like I said before, this reads like a mannerly Jim Thompson book once things start coming unglued. It takes a lot of lying and killing to cover up a murder. I was a little surprised the body count wasn't higher once everything was said and done.

Still, I caught myself wanted Tom get away with it, kind of like Dexter Morgan or Walter White. I guess that means Patricia Highsmith knew a thing or two about writing. Four stars but I'm not in a tremendous hurry to read more about Tom Ripley.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

3.5 Stars

I came upon a little list recently called “17 Books for People Who Hate People” and I immediately thought, “hey, that’s me!” Mitchell concurred. I ended up with a super stinker as my first selection, but luckily I fared better with *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

I knew the premise of this book to be Tom Ripley, an acquaintance of Dickie Greenleaf, is asked by Dickie’s father to go to Italy and attempt to convince Dickie to return to the U.S. I also knew at some point Tom’s developing friendship with Dickie while in Europe morphs into more of an obsession and that stuff happens. (No spoilers on this one, friends.) That was about it, though. I had never seen the movie because this

is the most punchable face in all of mankind and I just can’t watch his movies. Completely unfounded and I’m sure Mr. Damon is a pleasant fellow, but I want to slap the crap out of him whenever I see him. (How will I ever deal with the movie version of *The Martian*?!!!! Ohhhhhh woe is me!) I also can’t forget to mention the film co-starred Goop as the leading lady and, well, eww . . .

The one thing that might be worth taking a little looksee is this . . .

Purrrrrr. Anyway, enough about the movie I never saw. This is a book review (and obviously a super highbrow one at that). For a story that is **60** years old, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* holds up to the test of time remarkably well. There are a few “lost in translation” moments when dealing with things like money and the idea that a couple grand is a giant bankroll that will float you through Europe almost indefinitely, as well as the use of outdated lingo such as “sissy” or “pansy” used to describe Tom. Speaking of, I’m sure some might take offense to whether or not Tom was attracted to Dickie sexually being used as kind of a giant pink elephant in the room throughout the story, but I thought it worked well as a diversionary tactic. It helped hide the fact that Tom was not interested in **anyone** sexually (which he flat out tells you through his narrative), but he was quite possibly a sociopath who had fixated on obtaining a lifestyle like Dickie’s that no one seemed to notice.

Recommended to anyone interested in a real slow roller type of suspense novel, an addition to your “modern classics” list, or those of you who like to read about people you’re supposed to hate (but really kind of love). Half star removed because there are **FOUR** more of these in the series? **NOOOOOOPE**. As far as I’m concerned, this one is a standalone. Tom’s story does not have enough material for more books and I don’t

believe the others could even come close to being as good as the first.

Darwin8u says

Anticipation! It occurred to him that his anticipation was more pleasant to him than the experiencing."

? Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Highsmith is amazing. She alludes to Henry James, plays with Nabokovian style, James Cain's dialogue, and blends it all with a Camus-like modern existentialism. Plus, the goddess walked around with snails in her purse. Face it, pretenders, 'The Talented Mr. Ripley' is an amazing psychological crime novel. This is one of those books which should be used as evidence to highlight the case that some of the best literature of the 20th Century came out of genre fiction. The novel is high-wire, high-risk, high-reward masterpiece. It leaves me amazed the Cure didn't just write their existential anthem to Highsmith:

I can turn
And swim away
Or I can raise up my oar
Staring at a boat
Staring far ashore
Whichever I chose
It amounts to the same
Absolutely nothing.

I'm alive
I'm dead
I'm lying Tom Ripley
Killing a Signor.

Algernon says

[7/10]

I can do a number of things – valeting, baby-sitting, accounting – I've got an unfortunate talent for figures. No matter how drunk I get, I can always tell when a waiter's cheating me on a bill. I can forge a signature, fly a helicopter, handle dice, impersonate practically anybody, cook – and do a one-man show in a nightclub in case the regular entertainer's sick. Shall I go on?

What Mr. Ripley leaves out from his resume is his readiness to murder anybody he sees as an obstacle in his path to personal happiness. And the fact that he doesn't actually like to work. He wants all the perks of wealth and leisure, but he wants them right now, while he is still young. Even worse, he feels entitled to a life of riches and the respect of the gentle folks, probably out of his exalted opinion of his own cleverness and out of a feeling discriminated against in childhood by an authoritarian aunt.

Everything Tom Ripley ever wanted seems within his grasp when he somehow ingratiates himself with Mr. Greenleaf, an older New York industrialist, from whom he extracts money for a trip to Italy, there to convince his son Dickie to return home. Dickie has given up his place in the family business in order to pursue a painting career in Mongibello, a small seaside town near Napoli. When Tom arrives and sees Dickie's lifestyle in southern Italy, so different from the hustle and bustle of New York, his own career as a small time confidence trickster pales in comparison:

It wasn't as much fun as sailing a boat in old clothes and being answerable to nobody for the way he spent his time, and having his own house with a good-natured maid who probably took care of everything for him. And money besides, to take trips if he wanted to. Tom envied him with a heartbreakin surge of envy and self-pity.

I don't think it is much of a spoiler to say that Tom Ripley is ready to commit murder to get his hands on all this. The novel is more an exploration of the character of a sociopath than a conventional whodunit. Spending time inside Ripley's mind is a deeply disturbing experience, witnessing his total lack of scruples and his twisted self-justifications, the careful premeditation of his crimes and his obvious pride at getting away with it. I guess my reaction is normal, exactly what the writer wanted from the audience. I should have been more worried if I actually felt sorry for Tom. Still, my negative reaction to the main character of the novel explains the rather low rating for what is probably one of the best psychological thrillers of the 1950's. There's also more to admire in the book, beside the detailed investigation of Ripley's character. There's the sustained tension the reader is put through, the ominous build-up of hints that something bad is about to happen, the contrast between the innocuous outside visage Tom presents to the world and the darkness inside, the cat and mouse game between Tom and the police later in the book, his mood swings between paranoia and exhilaration at his lucky escapes. And, for those who love Italy like me, the book is quite accomplished as a tourist guide, praising the attractions of Venice, San Remo, Rome, Napoli, Capri, Cinqueterre, etc. (*He liked the fact that Venice had no cars. It made the city human. The streets were like veins, he thought, and the people the blood, circulating everywhere.*)

Patricia Highsmith builds a convincing case here to explain Tom Ripley's exploits, yet again, given my own misgivings about him, I wanted real bad for Tom to be caught and punished as soon as possible. Often I felt that the police, Dickie's girlfriend and all the other people pursuing Tom Ripley would compare notes and start asking the right questions, would for once see behind the mask and expose the monster's duplicity. Highsmith brings two main arguments in favor of the mouse: his chameleon 'talent' and his willingness to take chances. We are presented repeatedly with Ripley's boasts that he could impersonate anyone, anytime. I have to examples to demonstrate the thesis:

Hadn't he learned something from those last months? If you wanted to be cheerful, or melancholic, or wistful, or thoughtful, or courteous, you simply had to act those things with every gesture.

A cap is the most versatile of headgears, he thought, and he wondered why he had ever thought of wearing one before? He could look like a country gentleman, a thug, an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a plain American eccentric, depending on how he wore it. Tom amused himself with it in front of the mirror.

Risks are what made the whole thing fun exclaims Tom at one point, ignoring previous moments of nail-biting terror and panic and promising more dirty deeds for the follow-up novels.

I could spend more time on Tom, trying to decypher the puzzle of his sexuality and what influence it had on his pathological need to hide and to playact instead of being himself. Or on his fear of women and denial of homosexual attraction towards Dickie. On his obsessing over clothes and fascination with mirrors, with fine

art and haute cuisine. Indeed, I could see the novel as a subject of study in medical schools, students being graded over how many symptoms of mental illness they can identify. But new titles are already claiming my attention. I probably will read the next Ripley books, but before that I might try other Patricia Highsmith titles (Strangers on a Train beckons me at the moment), hoping to have a less repulsive reaction towards the main character.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

495. The Talented Mr. Ripley, Patricia Highsmith (1921 - 1994)

The Talented Mr. Ripley is a 1955 psychological thriller novel by Patricia Highsmith. This novel introduced the character of Tom Ripley, who returns in four subsequent novels known collectively as the Ripliad. It has been adapted numerous times for film, including the 1999 film of the same name.

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Richard Derus says

Rating: 4.5* of five

The Publisher Says: Since his debut in 1955, Tom Ripley has evolved into the ultimate bad boy sociopath, influencing countless novelists and filmmakers. In this first novel, we are introduced to suave, handsome Tom Ripley: a young striver, newly arrived in the heady world of Manhattan in the 1950s. A product of a broken home, branded a "sissy" by his dismissive Aunt Dottie, Ripley becomes enamored of the moneyed world of his new friend, Dickie Greenleaf. This fondness turns obsessive when Ripley is sent to Italy to bring back his libertine pal but grows enraged by Dickie's ambivalent feelings for Marge, a charming American dilettante. A dark reworking of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*—is up to his tricks in a 90s film and also Rene Clement's 60s film, "Purple Noon."

My Review: This nail-biting page-turner is the first of Patricia Highsmith's novels featuring amoral, mass-murdering sociopath and all-around bon vivant Tom Ripley.

What can I add to the generations of praise heaped on Highsmith's male alter ego? What else need be said? What delicious evil, what glamourous grue, and told with such economy of language!

Well, for one thing, Tom's as bent as a bow, and because the book came out (!) in 1955 it wasn't possible to say frankly that he was *that way* and so was Dickie (!!) Greenleaf and Marge was a big ol' fag hag and Daddy Greenleaf was sending Tom to Italy in hopes that a cute boy would succeed where a revolted father

failed to convince his queer son to return to a soul-killing life of pretending to be straight.

And now that I've delivered the post-Stonewallization of the book, I return to the text as presented.

The characters are all deftly drawn to present us their essences in a short burst: Tom cruising bars and letting an older man (Pa Greenleaf) pick him up; Dickie resisting Tom's charm until Marge, acting as wing man, throws them together; Marge then doing the twist as she sees her efforts rewarded with too much success. It's all done in 30pp and it's set from there on, so suspense has to be created with audacity on the writer's part. We're drawn into Tom's troublingly untroubled world of crime, we're seduced into seeing the problems of Tom's murders from his point of view as puzzles to be solved in order to protect his now-customary lifestyle.

It's a very difficult feat to pull off. It's even more amazing when one considers the author, a big ol' dyke, was writing in one of Murrica's most homophobic AND law-and-order obsessed eras. Highsmith, from all reports an unpleasant person to know, does this difficult balancing act with an assured hand at the storytelling tiller and a character-compass that pointed true north at all times. This is high quality storytelling, done in simple, unadorned prose. It is very much recommended and it's worth your time.
