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# The Masked Other: Patricia Highsmith in Cold War American Culture

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Senior Thesis

THE MASKED OTHER:  
PATRICIA HIGHSMITH IN COLD WAR AMERICAN CULTURE

submitted by

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## Introduction

Patricia Highsmith, an American novelist and short story writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, defied simple categorization in her violent, psychologically stimulating novels. Highsmith was most commonly known for her psychological thrillers, which led to numerous film adaptations and gained her much acclaim in the literary world. In her lifetime, Highsmith published 22 novels and 8 short-story collections. In addition to her published works, she won a variety of literary awards including those for *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Throughout her life, Highsmith traveled to various places around the world, never feeling completely satisfied with one location. After her extensive world travels, Highsmith deduced she “would know hundreds of people in different cities and yet she would still be lonely. ‘I am forever-seeking,’ she said” (Wilson 12). Her own feelings of loneliness and abandonment translate into her works of fiction and aid in the creation of her characters. Highsmith was a quietly subversive presence in America but in Europe she quickly won literary recognition. For much of her career, Bloomsbury in England, Calman Levy in France, and Diogenes in Germany published her works. Despite her popularity in Europe, she was published and dropped by eight different houses in America (Gordon 16). As a crime fiction writer, Highsmith wrote on a variety of topics including homosexuality and amorality, with emotionally unstable men as her antiheroes.

The 1950s genre of crime fiction is generally characterized as hard-boiled fiction filled with “tough-talking, streetwise men; beautiful, treacherous women; a mysterious city” and a hero who strives “to bring a small measure of justice to his...world” (McCann 42). Most crime novels share a common structure: first, there is the crime, usually a murder; then the investigation; and finally the punishment, which often takes the shape of the criminal's arrest or death. The hard-

boiled crime narrative first appeared in the style of the adventure story in 1920s pulp magazines during the height of the crime wave after WWI. Audiences at the time were excited for fiction that recognized the realities of the industrial city (McCann 42). Patricia Highsmith bent these rules in her writing of psychological thrillers and chose to be different in her writing and interpretation of crime fiction: “To call Patricia Highsmith a thriller writer is true but not the whole truth: her books have stylistic texture, psychological depth, mesmeric readability” (*The Sunday Times*, London). She utilized cultural definitions of the psychopath and altered the typical crime fiction novel by writing a narrative that did not end with the criminal’s arrest or death, but with his triumph. In her article, “Patriotic Perversions: Patricia Highsmith's Queer Vision of Cold War America in “The Price of Salt”, “The Blunderer”, and “Deep Water””, Victoria Hesford writes, “Highsmith and her work evaded categorization, in both form and content” (217). She was not strictly a mystery writer, Highsmith wrote about human relationships and through these relationships she expressed a certain pessimism about the world.

Similar to the typical crime fiction style, Highsmith did write about the realities of society. However, she chose to play on the Cold War fears concerning homosexuality and the emerging knowledge of the psychopath who could blend into any situation, rather than writing on typical urban crimes. In bending the rules and creating a new rubric for the genre with *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Highsmith called readers’ attentions to the anxieties of Cold War American culture and the notion that the subversive character does not always receive punishment for his actions. In criticizing her style, “one begins to understand how radically Patricia Highsmith does not fit in, and to appreciate the degree to which this can only be unnerving to her publishers and sellers alike” (Gordon 16). In his review entitled “The Talented Miss Highsmith”, Neil Gordon describes Highsmith’s desire to look at the

psychological aspect of murder rather than simply presenting a murder mystery for her readers. In *Strangers on a Train*, the reader knows about the murders from the beginning of the book and it is the twisted, subversive relationship between the two male characters that provides the mystery for the reader. In the case of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the reader already knows who has committed the crime; it is the ambiguous motive and the antihero that present the mystery.

The quintessential who-done-it mystery does not exist for Highsmith. On the contrary, she provides the murder scene, the murderer, and the weapon but leaves the mystery in the motive. Raymond Chandler, another renowned crime fiction writer stated, “Hard-boiled fiction ‘gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons,’” (McCann 43). Highsmith subverts this notion of giving murder to the people who commit it for reasons by having her protagonists kill for ambiguous motives. The motive is the mystery in *Strangers* and *Ripley* because Charles Bruno and Tom Ripley’s psychopathic natures and violent tendencies push them toward murder, but their motives are somewhat mysterious. In creating these novels with psychopaths as her protagonists, Highsmith reconstructs the paranoia of society during this historical period and makes her readers feel the fear and anxiety that accompanies the ambiguous reasons for killing. *Strangers* abides by the common rules of crime fiction with its murder plots, the investigation, treacherous women, and an unconventional relationship. The novel undermines the structure in that the unconventional relationship takes place between two male characters instead of the classic pair of the femme fatale and the main detective. The reader is able to form an attachment and fascination with Bruno that is not typical of the other “bad guys” in previous hard-boiled novels. In addition, Highsmith’s first *Ripley* novel abides by the general principles of crime fiction with the concept of murder, an investigation and the protagonist’s ridicule, yet the novel goes against the typical structure by having the criminal triumph and escape. The novel’s

main character, Tom Ripley, is the antihero of the text and his persuasive personality draws the reader in, creating an intrigue and connection between the reader and the criminal. This fascination and emotional connection between the reader and the criminal did not exist before in most American crime fiction due to the fact that readers generally identified with the character of the Continental Op. The Op acted as the hero of hard-boiled crime fiction works and his “investigative prowess [brought] order, and the law” to the novels, thus gaining popularity with readers who sought a sense of justice at the end of the criminal works (Pepper 58).

## Cultural “Others” in Cold War America

Prior to the reading and analysis of *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* one must understand the concepts of homosexuality and psychopathy as they relate to Cold War America during the time of Highsmith’s writing. The 1950s were characterized by a new push toward domesticity and the concept of the perfect American citizen. During this time, homosexuals were considered a threat to national security and the notion of domesticity that was encouraged by society and linked to heterosexuality:

[In] the 1950s a comparable shrillness, even hysteria, dominated the political public sphere. The McCarthy witch-hunts...and the ‘lavender scare’...created a ‘moral panic’ that was also the *mise en scene* for postwar anxieties about economic reorganization and the worldwide military and political expansion of American power. (216)

The 1950s in American history demonstrated a fear concerning the homosexual as a subversive member of society that could seduce the normal, moral American citizens. Morality and security were the main focuses of this panic and Americans felt an overwhelming threat concerning their safety at home. They focused on the notion of the “enemy within” which meant that anyone could be a delinquent, a communist, or a radical and threaten the ideal domestic family unit:

[Many] commentators understood communists and homosexuals to possess similar characteristics, including moral corruption, psychological immaturity, and an ability to ‘pass’ undetected among ordinary Americans. (Friedman 1106)

The link between the fear of communism and the fear of homosexuals demonstrates the heightened fears of the American population at this time. Cold War paranoia concerning communists turned into anxieties about homegrown threats. Society viewed homosexuals and communists as hazards to their safety and domestic life. Their supposed moral corruption and their ability to pass undetected among ordinary Americans struck fear into society. Highsmith’s, Tom Ripley, in the *Talented Mr. Ripley*, is the feared “other” that could not be categorized due to his sexual ambiguity and lack of personal relationships with others. In addition, Tom camouflages himself making him seem

unassuming despite his true harmful nature: “[m]uch of Highsmith’s work can be understood as a sustained metaphor of the Cold War” (Shannon 25). Shannon’s statement expresses the feeling of alienation felt by homosexuals in the workplace and within personal social settings. The “Red Scare” combined with the “Lavender Scare” to demonstrate the link between society’s fears of both the communist and the homosexual. The “Lavender Scare” accompanied the fear of communism and this scare, named for its ties with homosexuals, was one “in which thousands of suspected homosexuals were investigated, interrogated, and dismissed by government officials and private employers” (Friedman 1105). The government felt threatened by homosexuals just as they felt threatened by communists because they could not quite define them. They viewed homosexuals’ sexual preference as a threat because they were unable to make sense of it, thus resulting in a governmental purge. America supported a return to domesticity and an ordinary family unit consisting of a heterosexual couple and their children—homosexuals posed a threat to this concept, therefore making them the other along with communists.

In addition to social anxiety concerning homosexuals and the “un-American other,” the 20<sup>th</sup> century presented a fascination with the concept of the psychopath. The disease was referred to as “constitutional psychopathic inferiority,” implying the issue was inherent to the genetics of the affected person. It was used as a catch all for any and all dysfunctional or antisocial behavior, and in psychiatric classification it labeled a wide range of alleged mental deviances, including homosexuality. In 1901, Freud published, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, a work that discussed the strange defects, malfunctions and various deviations from the stereotypes of everyday behavior. Freud concludes that these stereotypes indicate the underlying pathology of the psyche. He discusses how various deviations from the stereotypes of everyday conduct—seemingly unintended reservation, random movements and actions—are a manifestation of unconscious

thoughts and impulses. After considering the various cases of deviations, he concludes that the boundary between the normal and abnormal human psyche is unstable and everyone is slightly neurotic: symptoms are able to disrupt eating, sexual relations, regular work and communication. For Highsmith, “reading Freud ‘shaped both [her] character and her writing’ (70) and...she once underwent psychoanalysis to ‘cure’ her lesbianism” (Shannon 25). Highsmith was not foreign to these psychological concepts and Freud’s work will aid in the examination of her novels as psychological or criminal case studies.

In order to fully examine the main characters in *Strangers on a Train* and the *Talented Mr. Ripley* I will also use the American psychiatrist Hervey Cleckley’s book, *The Mask of Sanity: An Attempt to Clarify Some Issues About the So-Called Psychopathic Personality*. The book was initially published in 1941 and describes Cleckley's clinical interviews with patients in a locked institution. Six editions of the book were produced in total, and it is considered an influential work and the most important clinical description of psychopathy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cleckley outlines the basic elements of psychopathy that are still relevant in modern day definitions. In addition, he provides a ‘clinical profile’, highlighting the 16 behavioral characteristics of a psychopath. The first edition named 21 but in the fifth edition he reduced it to 16 based on further study and observation:

Superficial charm and good intelligence;...absence of nervousness or psychoneurotic manifestations; unreliability, untruthfulness and insincerity; lack of remorse and shame; inadequately motivated antisocial behavior; poor judgment and failure to learn by experience; pathologic egocentricity and incapacity for love;...unresponsiveness in general interpersonal relations; fantastic and uninviting behavior with drink and sometimes without;...sex life impersonal, trivial, and poorly integrated; failure to follow any life plan. (Cleckley 338-9)

The title of the work refers to the normal "mask" that conceals the mental disorder of the psychopathic person. This mask is what American Cold War culture feared in their incapacity to identify such individuals within their everyday lives. Cleckley describes the psychopathic person as a superficially perfect mimic of a normally functioning person, with the ability to disguise the lack

of internal personality structure along with other normal functioning elements. Through Freud and Cleckley, one is able to see how these concepts of psychopathy were circulating during the time of Highsmith's writing, thus acting as influences in her works.

In 1952 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) published the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), thus providing a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders. The DSM evolved from methods for collecting census and psychiatric hospital statistics as well as from a US Army manual (DSM-I, v). Revisions since its first publication have added to the total number of mental disorders, and reworked old diagnoses. The 1952 edition of the manual listed 106 mental disorders, which included numerous categories of "personality disturbance," generally distinguished from "neurosis". In 1952, in addition to the possibility of being homosexual, those suffering from sociopathic personality disturbance were described as "ill primarily in terms of society and of conformity with the prevailing cultural milieu, and not only in terms of personal discomfort and relations with other individuals" (DSM-I, 38). The manual lists the traits that classify a sociopath or psychopath, which include "Antisocial reaction," "Dyssocial reaction," "Sexual deviation," "Alcoholism (addiction)," and "Drug addiction" (85). The DSM-I provides an in depth description for each listed characteristic. In particular, the "dyssocial reaction" is described as encompassing, "individuals who manifest disregard for the usual social codes" and includes diagnoses such as "psychopathic personality with asocial and amoral trends" (38). The definition of the sociopath provided in the DSM-I acts as a useful tool to characterize the characters in Highsmith's novels. The use of Freud, Cleckley, and the DSM-I demonstrate the prevalence of these psychological terms during the time of Highsmith's writing and people's interest in the psychological make up of the American people.

Cleckley's concept of the "mask" hiding the true nature of the psychopath relates to the Cold

War era in its fear of the homosexuals who wore “masks” to cloak their true identities within the government. The “Lavender Scare” links to the 1940s concept of the psychopath presented by Cleckley, “any sexual anomaly, even in the minds of physicians, is unequivocally associated with antisocial behavior and therefore akin to psychopathic personality” (288). The fact that physicians recognized the association between the two behaviors demonstrates yet again the postwar fears of American culture. In addition, it recognizes American citizens’ tendency to quickly pass judgment on any behavior that seemed slightly abnormal. Sexual anomalies and mental anomalies are not psychically visible characteristics, making them harder to detect. Just as the psychopath blends easily into any situation, the communist and the homosexual pass through society undetected—making their subversive behavior mysterious and therefore more threatening.

Foucault’s essay entitled “The Abnormals” reprinted in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1)*, aids in making sense of the Cold War fears concerning the “other” and the “abnormal” in the 1940s and 50s. Foucault discusses the concept of psychopathy and defines what society considers abnormal, suggesting that this notion of the psychopath and the “other” created fear and haunted people within society. He goes on to explain the fact that three elements in particular form the abnormal: “the human monster,” “the individual to be corrected,” and “the onanist” (51-53). Ultimately Foucault’s argument suggests that society constructs ideas of normalcy through the definition of the abnormal. His theory will aid in further developing the argument concerning the abnormal behaviors of Highsmith’s characters and their relationship with Cold War societal fears.

In the 1940s and 1950s American citizens experienced feelings of high anxiety and fear based on communist and homosexual threats within the government. In addition, psychological theory at the time introduced the concept of the psychopath, today known as antisocial personality

disorder, which was an added fear that threatened the newly rejuvenated domestic sphere. The feeling that the enemy was someone at home, present in the everyday lives of Americans acted as a true threat to many American citizens and struck an illogical fear into their hearts. As a crime fiction, thriller writer of that era, Patricia Highsmith decided to play on the fears of society and create novels that introduced this subversive “other” who could mask his abnormal identity and commit murder—and get away with it.

## **The Abnormal Criminal in *Strangers on a Train***

Published in 1950, *Strangers on a Train* is Highsmith's "debut" novel and deserves to be looked at both in terms of her personal history as a writer and the social history of the era. As a lesbian, Highsmith personally experienced the Cold War paranoia and anxiety toward homosexuals. American Cold War politics entwined with severe homophobia and branded homosexuals of the era as national security risks. Highsmith's creative goal, something she wrote in her notebook during this time, was "Consciousness alone, consciousness in my particular era, 1950" (Wilson 158). Her statement suggests that, through her works of crime fiction, she is trying to raise awareness and display the harsh realities of society. In her desire to create social consciousness, Highsmith wrote about the concern for the abnormal citizen and the feared other. With consciousness as her creative goal, despite some changes to the genre, Highsmith kept with the hardboiled fiction notion that "[t]he characters you read about are real human people" (McCann 43). Her characters and their insanities are real, forcing 1950s American readers to take stock in their irrational social anxieties. Since its publication in 1950, the novel has been adapted numerous times for film, theater, and television. One of the most notable adaptations is the film version, which premiered in 1951 and was directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Additional films and television series, such as "Throw Momma from the Train" (Danny DeVito, 1987) have referenced or parodied the novel, demonstrating its continual relevance in present day society.

In the 1940s, when Highsmith wrote *Strangers on a Train*, the concept of the psychopath began to surface as a feared figure within society. This concept of the other manifested itself not through skin color or ethnicity, but through certain personality traits deemed abnormal to the rest of society. Foucault refers to the phenomenon of psychopathy as, "The great indefinite and confused

family of ‘abnormals,’ the fear of which will haunt the end of the nineteenth century” (51). In this manner, Cold War paranoia of the other and the enemy at home aided in the formation of the psychopath. Highsmith responds to societal paranoia by creating a character that embodies these abnormal characteristics, writing a novel that addresses the fears of US citizens. In addition, based on Cleckley’s ‘clinical profile’, one can make comparisons between these behavioral characteristics and the character of Bruno. Psychological theories concerning the psychopath were circulating at the time of Highsmith’s writing and she could have been easily influenced by such thoughts due to her own interest in psychology. Through Bruno’s actions and personality, one notes his psychopathic qualities and their relation to the historical fear of this type within society. Bruno is a product of Cleckley’s findings and one could argue that Bruno’s character could have fit perfectly into Cleckley’s study as one of his patients. In addition, Bruno is a product of societal paranoia and his character helps create a different type of mystery writing that played on the fears of Americans characterized by the “Red Scare” and the “Lavender Scare” during the Cold War.

When *Strangers on a Train* debuted in 1950, a variety of critics responded with both positive and negative criticisms. A writer from *The New Yorker* wrote, “This is unquestionably the understatement of the year...A horrifying picture of an oddly engaging young man, who has all the complexes you ever heard of. Highly recommended.” The reviewer notes the vividly terrifying picture painted by Highsmith and recognizes Bruno as an engaging, mentally complex character. Bruno’s oddities and mental complexities make him inviting, yet frightening. He draws the reader in with his charm, yet scares the reader due to his psychopathic personality and his ability to kill with little remorse. Another reviewer at the time of the publication wrote:

It has obvious faults. It is not always credible, and the characters are not entirely convincing. Nevertheless, it is a highly persuasive book...one is held by an evil kind of suspense. It becomes more believable than one would suppose—a rarely perceptible study in criminal psychology. (*New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 1950)

While the critic ultimately praises the novel for its psychological accuracy and persuasiveness, he manages to critique the characters and the work's credibility. At the time of the novel's release, reviewers were already employing psychological language to describe it. The little knowledge they possessed in terms of the psychological framework of these fictitious characters inspired the use of psychological terms, thus supporting the later more in depth psychoanalysis of her work. Critics of crime fiction were interested to see if Highsmith's first novel could find a place within the genre. After publishing the novel, Highsmith was officially labeled a mystery writer, giving her a place among the crime fiction writers of her era (Wilson 171). The praises and critiques demonstrate her capacity as a writer and her ability to play on the fears of her readers. Graham Greene later wrote, "[Highsmith is a] writer who has created a world of her own—a world claustrophobic and irrational which we enter each time with a sense of personal danger" ("Patricia Highsmith"). The claustrophobic nature of her work and the notion that people like Bruno can and do exist, created, and still manage to create, an overwhelming sense of panic for Highsmith's readers. In her review of Marijane Meaker's novel and Andrew Wilson's text, Hesford refers to Highsmith as "a woman writer who wrote suspense novels that weren't detective fiction" (1311-12). Her statement demonstrates Highsmith's unique take on the genre and her desire to alter the typical hard-boiled crime fiction novel to create a psychological thriller.

In the novel, Guy Haines, an architect, wants to divorce his unfaithful wife, Miriam, in order to marry the love of his life, Anne Faulkner. While on a train to see Miriam about the divorce, he meets Charles Anthony Bruno, aka Bruno, a rich man who proposes an idea to exchange murders—Bruno will kill Miriam if Guy kills Bruno's father. In his mind, neither of them will have a motive, and the police will have no reason to suspect them. Guy brushes off the wild thought, but Bruno decides to kill Guy's wife while he is in Mexico with Anne.

Bruno notifies Guy of his crime, but Guy hesitates to turn him in to the police. Guy realizes that Bruno could claim his involvement in the premeditated exchange of murders. Bruno's lack of guilt is offset by Guy's extreme feelings of guilt, leading the reader to question the true victim of the work. After Bruno begins to write anonymous letters to Guy's friends and colleagues, Guy cracks under pressure and murders Bruno's father. Guy is then consumed by guilt, while Bruno obsessively seeks out Guy's company as if nothing has happened. During this time, a private detective, who suspects Bruno of having arranged the murder of his father, establishes the connection between Bruno and Guy.

Toward the end of the novel, Bruno falls overboard during a sailing cruise and Guy, having formed a bond with Bruno, tries to rescue him under threat to his own life. Bruno subsequently drowns, and the murder investigation is closed. Guy, plagued by a guilty conscience, confesses the double murder to Miriam's former lover. The detective investigating the murders overhears the confession and Guy is whisked off to jail.

Within the novel, Highsmith presents two main characters whose morality and mental states are up for debate. Highsmith's text provides a strong study of a psychopath and her use of the cultural myth of the psychopath along with the ordinary man's capacity to murder play on the cultural fears of the 1940s and 50s concerning these forms of internal threats in the US. Highsmith exhibits the fear of a subversive person that has, "an ability to 'pass' undetected among ordinary Americans," (Friedman 1106) in Bruno and his power to corrupt Guy. Highsmith employs the style of the omniscient narrator to explore the minds of Bruno and Guy, offering another point of entry into their deranged psyches. The murders in this novel have a motive but interestingly they are made to look motiveless. Bruno is motivated to kill Miriam because he believes that Guy will kill his father in return but he has no other connection to Miriam so in a sense he has no motive to kill

her. Vice versa, Guy has no motive to kill Bruno's father but the fact that Bruno has done him a favor gives him his motive. In analyzing the novel, one recognizes how Highsmith constructed the work and her psychopathic protagonist based on Cold War paranoia and psychological findings in the US.

### *Charles Anthony Bruno's Traits*

The main focus of Highsmith's novel is Bruno, an ageless alcoholic who has attachment issues with his mother and despises his father. He is wealthy, well dressed, and quite feminine in Highsmith's descriptions of him. Unlike Highsmith's later psychopathic protagonist, Tom, Bruno's homosexuality seems more obvious to the reader due to character descriptions, his actions, and his speech. Bruno is good at reading people and he easily uncovers their weaknesses and their vulnerabilities. From the beginning, Bruno makes himself well acquainted with Guy—confessing his interest in murder and his hatred for his father.

When Guy first encounters Bruno on the train he immediately notices his attire and his outward appearance that seem to show his inward impurities:

The monogram CAB, and the tie was of green silk, hand-painted with offensively orange-colored palm trees. The long rust-brown body was sprawled vulnerably now, the head thrown back so that the big pimple or boil on the forehead might have been a topmost point that had erupted...It looked neither young nor old, neither intelligent nor entirely stupid...The skin was smooth as a girl's, even waxenly clear, as if all its impurities had been drained to feed the pimple's outburst. (11)

The language of the passage suggests that Guy has an initial opinion of disgust concerning Bruno—his “offensively” colored orange tie and his revolting boil are unattractive yet intriguing. Guy cannot quite pinpoint Bruno's age or his intelligence and he is difficult to read—a key character trait of a psychopath. In addition, Bruno's skin is described as “smooth as a girl's, even waxenly clear” introducing the reader to his potential homosexuality or at least feminine qualities. The blemish is a symbol for Bruno's putrid character—all of his impurities within are being forced out

of his body and manifest themselves in this visually repulsive pimple. The boil on Bruno's head acts as a commentary for people like him within society. His queer behavior and psychopathic tendencies are impure and Highsmith suggests how Bruno, and people like him, are blemishes or impurities on the face of society. It could be said that the pimple shows Guy the deviance that lies within Bruno before he even talks to him and serves as his initial warning—one that he obviously chooses to overlook and pays the price for later.

The friendly banter between Bruno and Guy quickly delves into personal topics despite the fact that it is their first meeting. Bruno's friendliness might be in connection with his alcoholism. His tendency to drink copious amounts of liquor hinders his capacity to determine what is appropriate conversation and what is inappropriate. Bruno tells Guy, "I like to drink when I travel. It enhances things, don't you think?" (Highsmith 15) Bruno immediately warms up to Guy and notes his personal enjoyment of alcohol; a possible means to connect with his fellow traveler. In his book, Cleckley notes that one character trait of the psychopath is that "he is easy to talk with" (339). Bruno speaks freely with Guy and even when Guy tries to venture off on his own, Bruno finds him and continues to discuss his plot for murder. In his desire to speak on a personal level with Guy, Bruno admits to him that he has a less than satisfactory home life. Bruno confesses to Guy that he lives "In a house I call the Doghouse...There's dogwood all around it and everybody in it's in some kind of doghouse, down to the chauffeur" (Highsmith 16). He refers to his house as a "Doghouse" and later when Guy shows up at Bruno's home to murder Mr. Bruno he refers to it as a "Doghouse" as well, suggesting that the place is full of questionable characters that commit questionable acts. Moreover, the name suggests a masculine, animal relationship that ties to the murderous desires of Bruno and the Oedipal relationship between him and his mother. One could argue that Guy's moral transformation is complete once he enters the house and becomes a part of the doghouse, a concept

I will develop later on in my argument. Through his confession, Bruno creates a sense of intimacy between Guy and himself that will aid in his seduction of Guy. In this particular passage, Bruno refers to the idea that everyone in his house is in some kind of doghouse—Bruno’s father is a rich, selfish man who cheats on his wife; Mrs. Bruno is stuck in a loveless marriage and deals with her husband’s affairs; and Bruno, is a young adult who acts like a boy and suffers from a classic Oedipus complex. Bruno’s language suggests that he understands his own world in psychoanalytic terms, further demonstrating the novel’s ties to psychological theory. The novel’s critics and the characters in the novel, like Bruno, employ psychological terms to describe the situation. In addition, Bruno uses the word “house” instead of “home” to describe where he lives. The distinction between these two words suggests that he does not see his house as a home because he does not have or is incapable of having close meaningful relationships with his family and therefore does not see the abode as a place of warmth or comfort. For Bruno, the house embodies his hostility and is a doghouse due to its cold, functional nature and the animalistic, masculine qualities it houses. His residence and the discussion of his home life are telling of his character and allow the reader to assume that each of these characteristics combine to form the behavioral characteristics of a 1950s psychopath.

Bruno’s obsessive nature ultimately aids in his conversion and seduction of Guy, reaffirming cultural fears of the subversive powers of abnormal citizens. Bruno does not let Guy ignore him and tirelessly contacts him throughout the novel. At one point in the novel, Bruno begins to stalk Guy as a form of intimidation:

there was hardly an evening when Bruno was not standing on the sidewalk across the street from where he lived, as if Bruno knew the evenings he would come straight home...the tall figure with the hands in the pockets of the long, rather military overcoat that fit him closely like a stovepipe. (123)

Bruno's obsessive personality comes across in his pursuit of Guy. He stalks Guy until he holds up his end of the murder pact, a pact that exists solely in Bruno's mind since Guy never explicitly agreed to the exchange murders. Bruno cleverly employs intimidation and silent force in the form of a fantasy relationship to persuade the weak minded Guy. Drawing from Cleckley's definition of the psychopath, Bruno's lack of remorse and shame, his poor judgment and failure to learn by experience, his fantastic and uninviting behavior with drink, and failure to follow any life plan are all traits that make him as a psychopath. His seductive yet grotesque personality combines with his obsessive nature, making him a fascinating psychological case study.

#### *Bruno's Relationship with his Mother and Women*

In addition to his obsession with Guy and the motiveless murders they will commit, Bruno also possesses an interesting and oddly intimate relationship with his mother. As I previously mentioned in a review of Highsmith, her novel offers a noticeable study in criminal psychology (*NY Herald Tribune Book Review*, 1950). Bruno's bond with his mother is abnormal based off of what society deems normal in terms of a mother-son relationship and this connection invites a psychoanalytic reading perceived by both critics and readers. Foucault mentions in his work the notion of the family and how it can influence a child's sexuality: "The little incestuous family, the tiny, sexually saturated familial space in which we were raised and in which we live, was formed there" (54). Foucault makes this remark in response to the questioning of a child's sexuality, a concept that applies to Bruno in his odd relationship with his mother. During the 1950s, there was a push toward the veneration of the mother figure along with the renewed sense of domesticity in American society, but Bruno's particular closeness with his mother grotesquely walks the line between normal and abnormal. Bruno's association with his mother does not necessarily denote homosexuality although it does indicate defectiveness and male weakness due to its extreme nature. Their close relationship is juxtaposed by Bruno's intense hatred for his father:

‘Account of my father. Bastard...My mother’s coming out to Santa Fe in a couple days’...‘We have a lot of fun together—sitting around, playing golf. We even go to parties together.’ He laughed, half ashamed, half proud, and suddenly uncertain and young. (16-17)

Bruno’s detestation of his father goes beyond simple dislike and acts as his motive for planning his father’s murder. Bruno’s relationship with his parents is the retelling of the classic Oedipal relationship. He views his father as a competitor for his mother’s love and wishes he were out of the picture. In his study, Cleckley supports this theory in writing, “the confusing influence of a stern, authoritarian father and an indulgent or frivolous mother is common in the early background of the psychopath” (404). Bruno experiences a demanding father figure with his misogynistic father whose money and power threaten Bruno. Additionally, his mother seems to fit Cleckley’s indulgent, frivolous description in her enjoyment of parties and her male suitors. Bruno’s attachment to his mother goes beyond a close mother-son bond and crosses the barrier into questionable territory. His abnormal closeness with his mother goes beyond the normal veneration of the mother figure and may be viewed as an identifying characteristic of incompetence, suggesting his defectiveness as a male. Bruno attends parties with his mother, placing her in the role of his date and thus sexualizing her. He then proceeds to feel a sense of shame mixed with pride after explaining this relationship to Guy. His feelings suggest that he is partially aware that it is odd behavior but he does not mind it. His uncertainty and naïve nature demonstrate that despite his age, he is still mentally a young boy. Bruno has been socially and mentally stunted due to the fact that he still lives at home and must be nurtured by his mother. Her acceptance is highly important to him.

Bruno’s close relationship with his mother contrasts with his overall loathsome vision of women as filthy, seductive two-timers. Bruno discovers that Guy’s wife has been unfaithful and begins to rant about women’s disgusting natures. He claims they are:

‘Two-timers. At one end it’s two-timing and the other end it’s a whore! Take your choice!’  
‘What about women like your mother?’ ‘I never seen another woman like my mother,’

Bruno declared. 'I never seen a woman take so much. She's good-looking, too, lots of men friends, but she doesn't fool around with them.' (28)  
His extreme hatred for women and their promiscuity suggests that there is an underlying reason for this dislike. Bruno employs words such as "whore" and "two-timer" to describe women, strongly demonstrating his opinions of them as a dangerous, threatening gender. Bruno's hatred for women may be attributed to 1940s characteristics of a psychopath but it can also be accredited to the personal feelings of Highsmith:

Highsmith's abhorrence of women is palpable...One of her friends, for example, reports that 'The idea of women in a library appalled her, the thought that they could be menstruating at the same time as reading was disgusting...Women, she said, were dirty, physically dirty...She talked about women almost as if she was something other, like she wasn't one.' (Heilbrun 6)  
Highsmith hated other women despite the fact that she was a lesbian and even her closest friends noted her view of women as physically dirty, removing herself from being identified as part of the female population. Highsmith's distaste for the idea of women menstruating in a library is an idea that Bruno echoes in his countless descriptions of women's disgusting nature. Bruno acts as if women and their actions personally offend him. He is uncomfortable in their presence and his anger toward their sexual desires suggests that he is frustrated with his own sexual urges or his incapacity to have these sexual urges toward women. His mother is the only female that has been there for him through it all and he does not see her as a shrew or a harlot despite her wide variety of male friends. His mother is perfect and nearly incapable of doing wrong from his perspective.

### *Bruno's Sexuality*

Bruno's close relationship with his mother and his disgust toward other women suggest an underlying homosexuality in his character that accompanied the persona of the psychopath in the 1950s. Homosexuals were considered a national security risk and "men who refused to settle down and have a family became the focus of social and political anxiety" (Hesford 219). Bruno fits perfectly into the postwar description of the perpetual bachelor who refuses to settle down and even

more unsettling to Americans at the time was the fact that Bruno was a bachelor with little interest in women. Highsmith highlights Bruno's potential homosexuality through his actions and mannerisms. His hands act as a symbol that particularly call attention to his feminine nature: "The hands played clumsily with a match cover and dropped it, like a baby's hands, onto the ash-sprinkled steak" (22). Bruno's hands are first described like a baby's hands, suggesting his stunted maturity level and his feminine qualities. His clumsiness insinuates that he is not comfortable in his own body and possesses certain insecurities when it comes to his manhood. In this particular passage, Bruno may be eating a steak but that is the only thing that is traditionally masculine about him. Hands are also common symbols of rectitude and deviousness. The right hand symbolizes correctness while the left symbolizes deceitfulness or deviant behaviors. The attention to Bruno's hands suggests this debate between his "correctness" and his capacity to be deviant. There is never a moment where he is specifically called a homosexual but Highsmith alludes to this notion multiple times. Bruno's questionable sexuality surfaces once again after Guy tells him that he's married: "Bruno looked less friendly, Guy suspected, since he had told him he was married. And more curious" (24). Bruno's demeanor toward Guy changes when he discovers he is married. It seems as though Bruno feels a sense of jealousy at the thought of another person having an intimate relationship with Guy, especially a woman. Although the two have just met, Bruno appears to feel a sense of entitlement over Guy and he is unhappy at the thought of a woman, especially one who cheated, being involved with Guy.

In his case study Cleckley links sexual anomalies to psychopathic personalities, and Bruno's abnormal sexuality or lack of sexuality characterizes him as a psychopath. Bruno even hints at his own questionable sexuality stating, "I meet a lot of guys—no pun—but not many like you. I admire you,' he blurted, and sank his lip into his glass" (31). The quote directed at Guy suggests

that Bruno might be a homosexual. He recognizes that there is potential for a pun in his statement and chooses to identify it himself rather than letting Guy assume there is no pun in the comment. By making the remark, one perceives Bruno's insecurities concerning his identity. He admires Guy and acknowledges him as a person of interest and quality. In this case, Bruno's infatuation centers on his hatred for women and his desire to find the perfect partner to commit the perfect murder. Later in the novel, Guy begins to realize that their relationship is closer than he thinks: "Guy thought again of how bound up they were now, he and Bruno, by the score of people at the party" (203). After Bruno crashes his party, Guy begins to realize how he is intertwined with Bruno through their murder pact and now through their actual friendship. Bruno has inserted himself into Guy's life and he cannot get rid of him for many reasons—the murders being the obvious one—but to some degree it seems as if Guy half fears Bruno and half sympathizes with him. Something about Bruno evokes a feeling of compassion from Guy that only the two of them can understand.

#### *Violence and the "Perfect Murder"*

Bruno and Guy's relationship becomes unbreakable after the two exchange murders, fulfilling Bruno's vision of the "perfect murder". The concept of the perfect murder occupies Bruno's mind, and his need for perfection in connection with the murders demonstrates his sociopathic personality (Highsmith 29). He obsesses over the concept of murder and the notion of revenge and people getting what they deserve. Bruno truly believes that the murders of Miriam and his father are justified due to the characters' evil natures and deviant behaviors. His reasoning behind their murders is intriguing because one could argue that he is also guilty of deviant behavior. Bruno's language and his excitement when discussing the murder plans exhibit his lack of mental stability. Cleckley offers one motive for Bruno's desire to murder stating that the psychopath, "Having no major goals or incentives...may be prompted by simple tedium to acts of folly or crime" (392). Bruno's boredom due to the lack of a job or any real life goals drives him to commit

crime and eventually murder. At one point Bruno recalls a time when he broke into a house in Astoria just for the thrill of it, “‘I especially took what I didn’t want,’ he says” (Wilson 128). The thrill he gets from the petty theft demonstrates his wealthy boredom. The murders then display the fact that petty theft is no longer enough and he needs something more dangerous to pique his disturbed interests. Guy notices this quality in Bruno early on, yet he does not think to run from it:

An incredulous smile started on Guy’s lips, though actually he believed Bruno. Bruno could be violent. He could be insane, too. Despair, Guy thought, not insanity. The desperate boredom of the wealthy, that he often spoke of to Anne. It tended to destroy rather than create. And it could lead to crime as easily as privation. (22)

Guy notes that Bruno’s extreme wealth creates a boredom within him that causes him to react with insanity. Guy’s smile suggests that he gets a sense of enjoyment out of Bruno’s ridiculous, eccentric nature. The two are complete opposites, where as Guy must work to provide for himself, Bruno leads a leisurely life in search of the most extreme forms of amusement. Guy’s realization highlights the idea that wealth destroys rather than creates. It forms a complacent, rich consumerist society. Bruno resorts to murder due to his place in consumer society and his lack of purpose:

A sense of purpose, strange and sweet to him, carried him along in an irresistible current...He was on his way to do a murder which not only would fulfill a desire of years, but would benefit a friend...And his victim deserved her fate. (66-7)

Bruno finally finds a sense of purpose in his life when he murders Miriam for Guy. He feels an “irresistible” force pushing him toward the murder demonstrating his inability to control his violent desires. He distinguishes Guy as a friend, displaying a false intimacy between the two of them that Ripley echoes in Highsmith’s later novel. The idea of “deserving her fate” presents the notion of justice, justifying Bruno’s actions, thus finally giving purpose to his life.

Bruno finds purpose through the acts of violence he commits and the murders he plans. In becoming friends with Guy, Bruno feels that he can finally maintain a normal relationship, or one that society considers normal. Highsmith presents the first violent act with Miriam’s murder:

He shook her. His body seemed to harden like a rock...it felt as if he had made deep dents in her throat as in a piece of dough. Then she made a sound like an ordinary cough that terrified him like the rising dead...All the power in him he poured out through his hands.  
(81)

In the murder scene, Bruno and Miriam struggle with Bruno's hands about her neck, once again bringing up the imagery of his hands and the idea of their power. He reclaims a piece of masculinity with his small hands in murdering Miriam, yet her "death rattle" frightens him after he has done the deed, displaying his weakness once again. Highsmith refers to Miriam as a "piece of dough" exhibiting that, as a woman, Miriam must be tender and fleshy in contrast to Bruno's hardness or stiffness. In *Mortal Consequences: A History from the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*, Julian Symons, a great admirer of Highsmith, "understood that 'violence is necessary to her, because the threat or actuality of it produces her best writing'" (Heilbrun 5). The violence written by Highsmith, particularly in the murder scenes, produces a menacing feeling within the reader and manifests the societal fear of the other—characterized by the homosexual, the communist, and the psychopath—present in the 1950s. The terrifying truth is that Bruno has stalked and murdered Miriam only days after meeting Guy. Their chance meeting on a train results in a violent act between strangers who are not really strangers in the end. Miriam embodies the whores that Bruno despises, which could be a motivating factor for killing her. He views Miriam as the symbol for deviant women—the women his father sleeps with and the ones who reject him—and he takes his anger out on her.

After Bruno murders Miriam he begins plotting the murder that Guy will commit. The murder of Mr. Bruno, Bruno's father, holds higher value and motivation for Bruno due to his hatred for his father. In the classic Oedipal complex previously mentioned, with his father alive, Bruno is incapable of possessing masculine qualities and as a result he views murder as the only way out: "In his (violent) need to control...[he] mimics, in a perverse way, the discourse of national security that demanded a return to, and defense of, the home as the site of a national power that was also

masculine” (Hesford 225). Hesford’s essay establishes the concept of power as it relates to the home. The power of Bruno’s father is established in the family’s mansion and his authority over Bruno. By having him murdered, Bruno will claim the power role. The same could be said for Miriam and Guy in Miriam’s emasculation of Guy through her committing adultery, therefore humiliating him in the domestic sphere. The murders of Miriam and Mr. Bruno twist Hesford’s idea since they are attacking the home to protect it, but they regain this sense of masculinity through the violence they employ within the home: “He pulled the trigger. It made a mere click. He pulled again and it clicked...He pulled the trigger again...The roar came again, as if the crust of the world burst” (153). It takes Guy a few tries to actually murder Mr. Bruno, displaying his true incapacity to commit murder. He does not want to murder Mr. Bruno but feels the pressure to do so, proving the manipulative ways of Bruno. Guy’s reluctant murder suggests the social fear that anyone can be so convinced to murder. Later Guy reflects on the fact that, “he had not wanted to do it, he thought. It had not been his will. It had been Bruno’s will, working through him” (158). Guy reveals Bruno’s seductive power and the fact that he has infiltrated his mind. Guy has committed the murder and now he must pay the psychological price.

### *Guy’s Moral Dissent*

By joining Bruno in his plans to murder, Guy exhibits a moral transformation that acts as an example of the moral human’s capacity to commit immoral acts—a great fear of post WWII society. Guy’s name suggests the idea that “Guy” could be any generic American citizen and someone like Bruno could easily seduce and convert him with his persistence. The thought that a once moral man could be changed by an amoral, corrupt one to the point of committing murder pulls this fear to the forefront of her readers’ minds. This concept of morality is unique to the novel and it is something that Highsmith’s later novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, lacks. Guy and Bruno have countless discussions concerning the human capacity to commit murder and deviate from the

norm and Guy finally deviates from the norm by committing murder. Guy's personality makes him vulnerable to Bruno's seductive ways and gives Bruno the ability to exercise power over him. At one point Bruno says to Guy, "Any kind of person can murder. Purely circumstances and not a thing to do with temperament! People get so far—and it takes just the least little thing to push them over the brink" (29). The idea that anyone can commit murder presents a frightening thought for not only Highsmith's readers in the 1950s, but contemporary readers as well. Bruno's comment and Guy's moral fall combine to show the societal fears of the seductive nature of perversion, and the idea of the masked subversive other in American culture. In the 1950s, societal observers drew parallels between communists and homosexuals, claiming each contained characteristics of "moral corruption, psychological immaturity, and an ability to 'pass' undetected among ordinary Americans" (Friedman 1106). Bruno embodies each of these characteristics. Bruno, who should represent the standard as a white, wealthy male, embodies the deviant who has tempted Guy and caused him to make poor, inappropriate choices. In a way, through their relationship, Highsmith reaffirms the societal anxiety toward the alluring homosexual who seduces upstanding citizens and causes them to deviate from the norm. Guy acts as an example for the successful, heterosexual male whose harmless encounter with a man on a train overturned his life. Bruno, although seemingly queer from the start, was unassuming yet he lured Guy into his trap.

After committing the murder, Guy goes through a series of doubts and fears. Yet, as the novel progresses, he takes on the strength he used to murder and exhibits less fear: "And why wasn't he more concerned? What state of mind was he in that he could no longer say even what state it was? Resignation? Suicide? Or simply a torpor of stupidity?" (203) Guy has adopted a bit of Bruno's mentality after murdering Mr. Bruno and he doesn't know what is wrong with him. His altered state of mind and lack of concern are symptoms of psychopathy—Guy, once a moral, law

abiding citizen has now turned into a deceitful murderer who does not actually believe he will have to take the fall for his actions. Guy shows the slightest bit of fear at this point in the novel, indicating the transformation of his character at the hands of Bruno. In his work on psychopaths, Cleckley describes one of his case studies, marveling at the “young man's powers of persuasion and...his accomplishments in getting people, sometimes the most unlikely people, enlisted in working with him to bring about his various and sometimes incompatible or absurd aims” (178). Cleckley’s notes on his patient seem like he could be describing Bruno and his abilities to persuade Guy, to bring about his “absurd aims”. Through Guy’s transformation Highsmith dramatizes the Cold War fears of the communist, the homosexual, and the abnormal. In the end of the novel, Guy worries that he too has the capacity to corrupt a good soul: “Guy had a horrible, an utterly horrible thought...he might ensnare Owen in the same trap that Bruno had used for him, that Owen in turn would capture another stranger who would capture another” (270). The fact that Guy could commit murder means anyone could commit murder. Owen could go on to do the same and the vicious cycle would perpetuate itself, creating a society of deviant murderers. Highsmith plays on one of the American fears that these visions of abnormality will become epidemic. Through Guy’s fears, Highsmith expresses the thought of the enemy at home that could turn America into a deviant place.

Under the persuasive power of Bruno, Guy begins to see a motive for murder. The murder of Mr. Bruno is a way for Guy to exert his masculinity. In his relationships with females, Guy is emasculated—Miriam cheats on him and Anne holds high expectations for his work and lifestyle: “He had seen it her way finally, the right way” (54). The quote comes from an early interaction between Anne and Guy, depicting Anne’s emasculation of him. In her essay, Hesford comments on murder as an indication of one’s lack of sexual prowess: “His murderousness isn’t so much a sign of a vigorous masculinity as a sign of his lack of sexual prowess” (221). In Guy’s case murder affirms

his lack of sexual prowess, since Miriam cheated on him, but he regains a masculine power by murdering a sexually active and somewhat promiscuous man, Mr. Bruno.

*Conclusion: Justice*

Highsmith incorporates a sense of morality and justice within *Strangers on a Train* that her later novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* seems to lack. The book of Plato that Guy carries with him on the train at the beginning of the novel alludes to the initial concept of justice. In the end of the work, both Bruno and Guy are punished for their crimes. Bruno ends up drowning at sea—the ocean purges him of his sins and washes away the evils that plagued him: “Guy knew Bruno had fallen overboard...Where was his friend, his brother?” (262-3) Guy’s concern for Bruno reveals the bond between them and the fact that he truly cares for Bruno in the end. Guy has formed an attachment to him and cannot bear to let his friend go. Later on Highsmith writes, “He [Guy] envied Bruno for having died so suddenly, so quietly, so violently, and so young” (264). Guy makes Bruno into a martyr in describing his violent, young death. He envies Bruno because he has found a way out and has absolved himself of the immoral acts that the two of them have committed. Guy’s reaction displays the camaraderie between him and Bruno, affirming his dissent into Bruno’s twisted world. Bruno dies quickly but in drowning, he must suffer for what he has done. Highsmith invokes this sense of justice by drowning Bruno and removing him from the world. She leaves her reader with the calming thought that he can no longer harm anyone, yet others like him could still be out there.

In order to receive punishment for his actions, Guy physically writes out a confession, then confesses to Owen (Miriam’s lover), and finally turns himself into Gerard, the detective. Guy is a moral individual who has fallen due to his relationship with Bruno, and for this reason he feels the need to absolve himself of his sins and has three acts of confession: “The hours of writing had tired him almost to a point of sleepiness...Who had really been hurt by either Miriam’s death or Samuel Bruno’s?” (264-5) Physically writing out his confession acts as a punishment in itself, causing Guy

to think back and relive the meeting on the train, the murders, and the aftermath of his choices. He must think critically about his actions and their repercussions, something that aids in the absolution of his immoral acts and helps his conscience. Yet, after writing his confession he contemplates the murders and still feels like they were justified to some degree, showing Bruno's continuing influence. Guy finally realizes that Owen truly loved Miriam and confesses to him in order to complete the second part of cleansing his conscience. Finally, in the end, Gerard finds Guy and "Guy tried to speak, and said something entirely different from what he had intended. 'Take me'" (281). Guy's conscience wins in the end and the detective, a symbol of authority within the law, punishes him for his indiscretions. Highsmith shows that a truly moral man, no matter how far he falls, knows in the end what is right versus what is wrong. Guy hands himself over to the police because he knows that he must suffer for his crimes and his confessions were necessary in regaining his moral conscience. Highsmith gives her readers the satisfaction of knowing that justice was served and the feared other did not win. Highsmith traditionally punishes deviant behavior in this novel but by the mid-1950 the deviant character does not get punished—he gets away.

## **Inside the Psyche of Tom Ripley, *The Talented Mr. Ripley***

Published in 1955, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is Highsmith's fourth novel, a psychological thriller that introduces the character of Tom Ripley. Due to his fascinating persona, Tom's character returns in four of Highsmith's later novels. Since its publication in 1955, the novel has been adapted various times for theater, television and film. One of the more notable adaptations is the 1999 American film version directed by Anthony Minghella.

The novel begins with the character of Tom Ripley, a young man struggling to make a living in New York City. One day, shipping magnate Herbert Greenleaf approaches him, asking Tom to travel to Mongibello, Italy where he must persuade Greenleaf's son, Dickie, to return home and join the family business. Tom agrees, exaggerating his friendship with Dickie, a half-remembered acquaintance, in order to gain Mr. Greenleaf's confidence.

Not long after arriving in Mongibello, Ripley meets Dickie and his friend Marge Sherwood. Tom quickly falls into good favor with Dickie, but Marge does not take to him as easily. As Tom and Dickie spend more time together, Marge feels left out and begins insinuating that Tom is gay. As a last effort to end the friendship in a pleasant manner, Dickie travels with Tom on a short holiday. Once there, Tom realizes he is trapped by his obsession with Dickie's life and Dickie's possessions. He is unable to control his desires, eventually having no choice but to murder Dickie.

Tom then assumes Dickie's identity, living off his trust fund and carefully writing letters to Marge to assure her that Dickie has ended things with her. He murders one more man, Freddie Miles, in a heated moment of panic. Tom then enters a cat-and-mouse game with the Italian police, but manages to keep himself safe by restoring his own identity and moving to Venice. The story concludes with Ripley traveling to Greece, escaping the Greenleafs, Marge, and the police. His lack

of guilt and his determination to continue living a life full of lies and deceit, offers an interesting study of the human mind. In addition it presents a fascinating examination of a psychopath's behavior when he knows people are watching.

Throughout the years, the novel has received various criticisms. In his book, *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith*, Andrew Wilson mentions the positive reviews that greeted the novel at the time of its release. In January 1956, *The New Yorker* reviewed the novel and found Tom to be “one of the most repellent and fascinating characters” of the era. The review continued stating, “Ripley kills one young man, for whom he feels a strong homosexual attachment, to get his money, and then murders another with whom he is hardly acquainted at all, on the ground that he may know too much”(198). Another review from 1955 came from Anthony Boucher, a detective fiction reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review*. Boucher commended Highsmith for her “unusual insight into a particular type of criminal” and illustrated Ripley as a “three-dimensional portrait of what a criminal psychologist would call a ‘congenital psychopathic inferior.’” He felt it presented a more developed character analysis than previous works, such as *Strangers on a Train*, and that it was a “skillful” novel (198). Accompanying the praise of her novel, Highsmith won the Edgar Allan Poe Scroll in 1956, which was presented by the Mystery Writers of America.

In addition to the criticisms of the novel at the time of its initial publication, the novel's popularity and the release of the film adaptation managed to spark contemporary criticism. In 1985, David Cochran wrote about Highsmith in relation to the historical context of her novels and their commentary on society: “For Highsmith the theme of homosexuality is not meant to be taken literally. Rather it functions as a symbolic device to undermine the certainties of postwar American culture” (Wilson 173). In 1988, one critic wrote, “[h]er amoral explorations of perverse behavior have confused American readers of crime fiction’ (qtd. in Rich 86)” (Shannon 25). The comment of

this critic demonstrates how critics were able to look back on her work and realize that Highsmith played on her readers' cultural fears. Highsmith continues to shock readers in contemporary times, further displaying her talents and twisted adaptation of a who-done-it genre. Finally, in Spring 2000, Gordon wrote,

And here lies the problem with Ripley...a fact somehow more troubling about Tom Ripley than his murders, something much deeper than murder...Highsmith provides a constant series of hints of Ripley's homosexuality. (18)

Andrew Wilson states that Tom, "is a device with which Highsmith was attempting to dismantle the coziness of conventional crime writing, she did not, in fact, dismantle it—she had no discernible effect upon it" (Hielbrun 5). Contemporary criticisms as well as reviews around the time of the novel's publication display a generally positive reception of the novel even though Highsmith experienced some backlash surrounding Tom's queerness. Earlier critiques generally discuss Tom as a disturbed yet fascinating character who resorts to murder out of monetary interest, while later criticisms focus on the psychological make-up of Tom, his homosexuality and its meaning within a historical context.

Together with *Strangers on a Train*, using the actual historical arguments about criminality as denoted by critics of the time, I plan to examine the character of Tom Ripley as a psychopath in Cold War America. Through the character of Tom and his interactions with others, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* presents an artistic version of the historical issue of American Cold War anxiety toward homosexuality. Similar to communism, homosexuality produced a widespread nervousness that is worth examining from a present day perspective. One could argue that Tom's character is a more developed Bruno—he is a careful, calculated killer that feels no remorse for his killings and he completely detaches himself from any sort of personal relationship.

In examining Foucault's concept of the abnormal, one must read Tom as a psychopath in order to understand his behavior and his motives as a murderer within Highsmith's novel. Through

the understanding of his motives, one can comprehend the everyday anxieties of Cold War culture, especially within large urban areas: “Cities were places of (potentially) unregulated social and sexual interaction, places in which different classes, races, and sexes could mingle and congregate outside” (Hesford 229). Large cities such as New York presented open spaces where anyone could exist and live how they wanted without people truly knowing their business. The notion of mobility within a large city is also true in Highsmith’s earlier novel, *Strangers on a Train*, through Bruno’s sense of freedom and anonymity within the city that allows him to murder. In looking at *Talented Mr. Ripley*, anonymity contributes to the fear of the other that Tom embodies as a sexually ambiguous psychopath. Not reading Tom as a psychopath, risks an entirely different interpretation of the work. The definition of the psychopath and his ability to move seamlessly through urban and social spaces perfectly defines Tom and looking at him any other way would cause the reader to lose a sense of his true character. In reading Tom as a psychopath, the reader is able to understand the added fear that society felt during this era concerning the unknown other. If Tom were simply a mentally unstable man, he would not be as terrifying to the reader because there would likely be reasoning behind his murders. The psychopathic diagnosis helps define his ambiguous actions; if he is not a psychopath then society cannot characterize him, making him more threatening.

#### *Tom’s Sexuality*

Highsmith never directly refers to Tom as a homosexual in the text, but one can be certain that Tom is not a heterosexual, thus he is part of the unknown other that creates anxiety within the Cold War culture. Previously mentioned, Andrea Friedman touches upon this societal fear and its connection to communism during the 1940s and 50s. Friedman states that “[m]embers of both groups lacked the masculine autonomy that enabled loyalty to the nation” (1106). Tom demonstrates Friedman’s notion of disloyalty in the guiltless murders he commits and his ambiguous motives. In the novel, his questionable sexuality surfaces when Tom mentions sex after

the death of Freddie, commenting, “Where was the sex? Where was the deviation?” (141) Tom laughs to himself thinking about Freddie’s suggestion that he and Dickie were homosexuals, noting that there was never any sex between them. Tom never blatantly engages in sexual intercourse with men or women, yet certain characteristics suggest he is a homosexual. When Tom first meets Mr. Greenleaf, he considers whether his shadow could be a “*pervert* ... as if the word could protect him, because he would rather the man be a pervert than a policeman. To a pervert, he could simply say ‘No thank you,’ and smile” (10). Tom repeatedly denies being “queer” throughout the novel, and employs self-demeaning language such as “pervert” and “queer”, demonstrating the blatant desire on his part to fit logically into the social context of the 1950s. The word pervert was used widely during this era as a buzzword for homosexuals, a concept that was new and foreign. Rather than understanding homosexuality and accepting it, people employed negative language and outright rejected the notion. The negative language contributed to the alienation of homosexuals and pushed them further into the category of the other. Through the misunderstanding between Tom and Mr. Greenleaf, Highsmith makes a social commentary on the cultural anxieties toward homosexuals during this time in history.

Tom is not obviously queer in sexual terms, but he is a queer individual in general terms. Tom’s sexuality or asexuality, act as revealing components of his personality and his inner struggle. Before he imitates Dickie in front of the mirror, the two share a smoke: “Dickie had a beautiful silver lighter, but it didn’t work well in the slightest breeze. Tom finally produced his ugly, flaring lighter, as ugly and efficient as a piece of military equipment, and lighted it for him” (75). The fact that Dickie has a beautiful lighter that fails to function in a gentle wind shows that he has nice but inefficient possessions that contrast Tom’s ugly, efficient ones. Tom views these possessions within a sexual realm, in that they “offer him ‘love,’ ‘pleasure’ ...and assurance of his very existence”

(Shannon 24). Dickie's possessions are sexualized due to Tom's use of them as a means of happiness and pleasure. Dickie may seem to have it all but when it comes down to it, he is simply a façade with little substance. Tom on the other hand has an ugly, flaring lighter that is sturdy and functioning. The lighters symbolize the men's appearances and may be viewed as sexual objects. The fact that Tom must light Dickie's cigarette for him demonstrates a power change in their relationship, emasculating Dickie and giving Tom the more masculine role. Despite this small masculine triumph in lighting Dickie's cigarette, Tom struggles with his identity and his own shortcomings. His internal/external struggle is magnified by his sexual indecision, making him mentally unstable. Tom's imitation of Dickie and his sick obsession with his lifestyle allude to his homosexuality even though he does not try to sexually pursue Dickie.

*Tom Ripley: The ultimate psychopath*

Tom acts as the guiding force of Highsmith's novel and may be characterized as an elegant, agreeable and amoral con artist and serial killer who constantly eludes the hands of justice. In terms of the crime fiction genre, Tom is unique and replaces the role of the quintessential private dick: "In the place of hard-boiled fiction's private dick, with a simple, strong code of honor and his doomed relationship with a toxic dame, we have Tom...who, like the detective, has a simple code"

(Shannon 18). Highsmith alters the hard-boiled detective by creating a murderer who possesses a simple code. Additionally, Highsmith presents the murder to the reader, making it less of a who-done-it and more of a psychological thriller: "With America in ascent and Europe still reeling from World War II, Tom Ripley represents a brutal new world order, one over which Highsmith despaired, seeing America in the 1950s as a nation in moral decline;" (Shannon 25). Tom's motive for killing acts as the central mystery to the novel with his desire as the driving force. A possible explanation for his motive might connect with his desire for possessions. He becomes obsessed with Dickie's nice clothing and trinkets and in the end he kills Dickie out of a desire to possess his

life/lifestyle: “Tom’s sexual longing is reserved for the objects he associates with Dickie and an American dream he feels has been denied him” (Shannon 26). Edward Shannon notes the concept of the American dream that exists within Tom and his desire to possess the luxuries in Dickie’s life. He notes how Highsmith employs Tom’s desire in order to illustrate the American obsession with consumerism and the Cold War notions of high-class aspirations. In imitating Dickie and wearing his clothing, Tom tries to overcome his middle class placement and join the ranks of the upper class: “upper-classness was often read in the Cold War period as a sign of effeteness and weakness” (Hesford 220). His upper class aspirations are viewed negatively by the Cold War culture in America that places worth on working class values rather than possessions.

Tom has the capacity to blend easily into situations and make himself into a nearly perfect mold of the people in his company—feigning empathy, shock, and sorrow at the appropriate moments. Tom wins the Greenleaf’s trust by simulating genuine interest in their predicament with their son Dickie, thus receiving a paid trip to Italy and the opportunity to take on a new persona: “‘You’re the first of Richard’s friends who’s even been willing to listen.’...Tom could easily understand that” (12). By nature Tom acts the part in every situation and finds himself “fitting in” among a wide variety of people. In this particular situation his ability to understand Mr. Greenleaf’s situation could be due to the fact that Tom knows about Dickie’s friends and realizes they are self absorbed people. On the other hand, his empathy could be attributed to his ability to feel a sense of comfort with people right away and his capacity for imitating the way others might feel about a particular circumstance: “He would seldom be confused with...someone who is trying to ingratiate himself for a concealed purpose...He looks like the real thing” (Cleckley 339). Tom’s ability to seamlessly travel from social group to social group, deceiving those around him, characterizes him as the feared enemy within American society.

In addition to his capacity for imitation, Tom feels a sense of overwhelming excitement at the promise of his opportunity to take on a completely new persona and flee his dull life in New York. Shortly after leaving the Greenleaf's Tom begins to notice changes:

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. (17-18)

In this passage, the reader notices that Tom is already starting to change and take on a new persona.

He is astonished by "how much straighter" he stands and "what a different look there [is] in his face." Both of these comments physically describe the beginning phase of his transformation into Dickie. The language hints at Tom's psychopathic nature, describing movements that don't seem like his own. In addition, at this moment when he feels like he is somebody else, he mentions it is one of the only times in his life that he is pleased with himself. Tom demonstrates a lack of self-confidence in his desire to be and act like someone else. Similar to Bruno, Tom lacks a steady job and his boredom leads to petty criminal acts as a form of entertainment, a trait recognized by Cleckley. The opportunity to travel has Tom physically crossing into new territory to assume a new identity. Even though he physically remains the same, in his mind he assumes the identity of another, demonstrating the battle between what we desire to see and what we actually do see.

### *Tom's Violence*

As a psychopath, one of Tom's defining characteristics is his proclivity toward violence. In particular, Tom's tendency to commit acts of violence typically occurs in moments when he must face the truth about his past or a personal fact about his life. When Tom feels that the truth is being pushed out of him, he has the desire to either attack the person questioning him or assume a new role in order to avoid the truth. He feels an impulse to attack Mr. Greenleaf—"Tom blinked his eyes, feeling a sudden terror of him, an impulse to attack him before he was attacked," (26)— after telling the truth about his Aunt Dottie, Tom feels vulnerable. Interestingly, he feels weak, fearful

and defenseless when he has told the truth and generally feels a sense of empowerment when he is at the height of his lies.

In addition to truths about his past, Tom must face truths about his present and these truths create a stronger urge for violence within him. One day, after Tom has befriended Marge and Dickie, he accidentally witnesses the two of them having sex. After observing them in this animalistic act, he furiously heads back to Dickie's home: "He had a curious feeling that his brain remained calm and logical and that his body was out of control" (77). Tom wanders around Dickie's room and proceeds to put on Dickie's clothes and stand in front of his mirror. He then acts out a murder scene in which he kills Marge, "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" (77-78). The scene highlights Tom's capacity to kill and foreshadows his actions when he murders Dickie and Freddie. He must face the truth of Marge and Dickie's sexual relationship, which angers him and inspires his acting out Marge's murder: "Sexual immaturity can be more aptly used...as a term to describe all psychopaths" (Cleckley 290). Tom's sexual immaturity is simultaneously a characteristic of psychopaths and a potential motive for the murders he commits. After Tom witnesses the two engage in sexual intercourse, he becomes enraged and has an almost out of body experience. Tom is too attached to Dickie and exhibits strong sensations of jealousy when he realizes that Dickie is intimate with Marge and Tom is unable to fulfill that form of pleasure for Dickie. His reaction acts as a possible motivation for his murderous desires but the reader cannot solely blame his urges on this encounter. Therefore Tom's motives are still ambiguous, leaving the reader confused by him and unsure of whose side to take.

After witnessing the intimacy between Dickie and Marge, Tom tries to justify what he has seen by claiming that Dickie "didn't mean it" and that he was "only using this cheap, obvious easy

way to hold on to her friendship” (76). Similar to Bruno when he discovers that Guy is married, Tom doesn’t want to recognize the truth that Dickie might not be sexually attracted to him. Furthermore, he mentions how his brain seems to remain calm and logical, yet his body seems out of control, which shows the divide between his logic and his actions. Tom acts out an entire scene where he takes on Dickie’s persona and murders Marge, which clearly demonstrates his mental instability and the fact that he is a dangerous person. He appears to feel no remorse for his thoughts and imitates every aspect of Dickie, revealing that Tom prefers imitating Dickie rather than having the real thing. Even his hair and lips mimic Dickie, further displaying his ability to flawlessly imitate others. Tom pretending to be Dickie talking to Marge exclaims, “You were interfering between Tom and me—No, not that! But there *is* a bond between us!” (78) He alludes to his connection with Dickie, linking his acts of violence with his sexual ambiguity. Their male bond could be misconstrued as something more romantic for Tom, but his incapacity to care for another human being makes that difficult to assume. Tom’s fantasy of Marge’s murder is the most developed murder/violence fantasy of the novel and Marge is the only character that does not get murdered between the three fantasies. It is possible that the intense experience he has while acting out the murder is a catharsis in itself, leaving him without the need to physically murder her. Also, the other murders are male deaths—displaying his need to express himself as the alpha male and regain his masculinity.

Tom’s violence is not the only characteristic that affirms his characterization as a psychopath; his inability to form personal relationships is a defining characteristic as well. Tom relies on the façade of a relationship rather than a real connection to remain in his social circles. The first failed relationship in Tom’s life is the one with his parents since they passed away before he could know them. His lack of parental guidance and his inability to have that parental support might

be a catalyst for his behavior. Due to his parents' deaths, Tom had to live with his Aunt Dottie who provided anything but love or guidance during his formative years. He discusses his Aunt Dottie in a conversation that ends up being too personal for Tom's liking:

That had been the only time tonight when he had felt uncomfortable...the way he might have felt if he had been lying, yet it had been practically the only thing he had said that *was* true: *My parents died when I was very small. I was raised by my aunt in Boston.* (25)

His discomfort after speaking about Aunt Dottie alludes to the awkward relationship Tom has with her. The only true statement he makes all night is the one that makes him most uncomfortable, demonstrating that he gets physically sick from telling the truth and that his relationship with his aunt is complicated to say the least. Their relationship can be examined through a psychological point of view, giving meaning to his unfavorable memories and feelings toward his aunt.

Once Tom embarks on his journey to Italy, he writes a polite note to his Aunt Dottie and feels better afterward because he believes he is officially cut off from her. He explains his dislike for his aunt who called both Tom and his father "sissies". Tom feels emasculated by her, referring to her as an ox. She constantly saw Tom as a burden and told him that he cost her a fortune: "Did anybody human keep rubbing a thing like that in a child's face? Lots of aunts and even strangers raised a child for nothing and were delighted to do it" (40). Tom offers the reader some insight into his past and sheds some light on the possible root of his problem. His inability to connect emotionally may be a combination of his past with his cold, selfish aunt and his own chemical imbalances: "Highsmith herself believed that her hatred of women was the fault of her mother, whom she loathed in childhood and continued to loathe throughout her life" (Heilbrun 6). In learning about Highsmith's own personal feelings toward her mother, it is possible that she wrote from experience when creating Tom. His hatred for his female role model demonstrates an extreme sentiment of loathing that connects to Highsmith's own hatred for her mother. In Tom's case, the lack of love in his upbringing has scarred him for life and made him view love as a perverse societal

creation. Despite his troubled childhood, the reader is still left unsure of Tom's motives. His desire to kill remains mysterious despite his obvious lack of interpersonal skills. The classic definition of the psychopath notes the lack of emotional connection between parent and child as a factor in the diagnosis but, similar to Tom's mysterious motives, one is unable to pinpoint the specific moment that made Tom the way he is in his present form.

### *The Murders*

Tom possesses "the psychotic facility to split the ego between two mutually exclusive realities; the singular ability...to allow the coexistence of two perfectly contradictory truths" (Gordon 19). Tom's ability to fantasize and separate his two personas allows him the feeling of a clean conscience. The notion of the psychopath as a murderous animal played on the fears of Cold War American society. Tom seems to be friends with Dickie yet something inside of him causes this to change and drives him to commit murder. The thought that someone could change their mind in such an erratic way contributes to the Cold War fear of the unpredictable American enemy that slips under the radar and wreaks havoc.

In the case of Dickie's murder, Tom has the urge to murder him a handful of times before he actually commits the crime: "He wanted to kill Dickie. It was not the first time he had thought of it...it had been an impulse caused by anger or disappointment...If he killed him on this trip, Tom thought, he could simply say that some accident had happened" (97-98). By fantasizing about the murder before he commits it, Tom demonstrates his psychopathic nature. Dickie's murder absolves Tom of the twisted guilt he feels for failing to befriend Dickie. Oddly, he does not feel guilty for failing the Greenleaf family, he feels more shame at the fact that he has failed himself and not accomplished what he came to do—Dickie must die in order for Tom to restore his power role. This sense of power relates back to the Cold War ideal of masculinity and one's demonstration of masculine power within society. Tom does not necessarily live by these rules of masculinity but

Highsmith gives him the desire for power in order to reaffirm his need to blend into society and appear normal.

Tom starts to become disillusioned with Dickie and all that he represents. He begins to realize that he does not know Dickie and their friendship is a false one:

You were supposed to see the soul through the eyes...in Dickie's eyes Tom saw nothing more now than he would have seen if he had looked at the hard, bloodless surface of a mirror...It was as if Dickie had been suddenly snatched away from him...like a horrible truth, true for all time, true for the people he had known in the past and for those he would know in the future...there would always be the illusion, for a time, that he did know them, and that he and they were completely in harmony and alike (87-88)

In a similar manner, as I discussed in my introduction, Highsmith felt that she would always be lonely despite her travels and encounters with hundreds of people (Wilson 12). Her personal insecurities concerning relationships and loneliness shine through in some ways in Tom. Tom fixates on the eyes, a classic symbol for foresight and the ability to truly see and know an individual. His focus on the eyes demonstrates his hidden desire to connect with Dickie, which contradicts his general need to remain emotionally disconnected from others. Tom realizes that Dickie's eyes lack soul, culture and ambition—something Tom views as a waste of human existence. He compares Dickie to the “bloodless surface of a mirror,” indicating his lack of substance and ultimate absence of human life within. Tom falls for Dickie's lavish lifestyle and carefree attitude, emulating everything from his speech to his shoes, but then realizes that Dickie disgusts him. Tom's extreme emotions demonstrate his instability and create a basis for his later, irrational choices.

Following his disillusionment with Dickie, Tom realizes that the only way to feel better about the situation is to murder Dickie. The scene in which Tom murders Dickie takes place over the span of two pages within the novel (100-102) and there are a few key moments that demonstrate his questionable motives and lack of guilt. Before Tom strikes Dickie with the oar, Highsmith's

writing suggests the sexual tension between these two male characters. In order to squash the sexually deviant feelings and continue on with his life, Tom must murder Dickie: “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” (101). One notes obvious sexual references from Dickie removing his trousers, and the playful description of the oar between Tom’s knees demonstrates that this is an enjoyable act rather than something Tom feels concerned about. Tom’s abnormal nature provides reasoning for his response yet in this moment his motive is still ambiguous. Murder is a pleasurable activity for Tom because he can express his true self—not the bourgeois Princeton man or the helpful friend going to save Dickie, but the obsessive, violent man behind these façades.

Following the initial hit on the head, Tom continues to beat Dickie due to his lack of masculine strength: “Tom stood up and brought the oar down again, sharply, all his strength released like the snap of a rubber band” (101). Tom uses all his strength in murdering Dickie and feels exhausted at the end of it, much like one is exhausted after sexual intercourse. He completely lets go of any sense of restraint in this moment and gives into his urges, displaying a rare instance for his character who generally holds in his emotions and sticks to thinking about his actions rather than following through with them. In Tom’s violent defense of his character he imitates “the discourse of national security that demanded a return to, and a defense of, the home as the site of a national power that was also masculine” (Hesford 225). In this case, Tom embodies the Cold War discourse of the defense of one’s self and home in order to display masculinity. For Tom, home refers to his personal reputation and his new identity that Dickie threatens. The boat scene draws a final homosexual connection between the characters, signifying Tom’s physical and sexual triumph

over Dickie as the dominant male. Dickie threatens Tom's masculinity so he must defend it in the most masculine way—violent force.

The second guiltless murder of the novel occurs once Tom has escaped to Paris. Once again Tom fantasizes about the murder beforehand, displaying the pleasure he gets from committing such distasteful acts. In his study, Cleckley noted a similar behavior in one of his patients, commenting, "He's cool and calculating" (214). Tom is both cool and calculating in the murders even though his plan to murder Freddie is less calculated because he is forced to act in a matter of minutes: "Tom twisted the stair rail in his hands as if it were Freddie's neck...Freddie wouldn't stop now until he had found Dickie" (137). Tom becomes panicked and thinks of ways stop the confrontation before it escalates and he is stuck in jail or forced to confess the truth to Freddie. The act of twisting the rail in his hands illustrates how his inner turmoil manifests itself physically and violently. In the case of Freddie his motive lies in his hatred for Freddie, his desire to evade punishment, and the fear of losing his new lifestyle and his lavish possessions.

The actual murder of Freddie is a violent affair, filled with blood, deceit, and anxiety for Tom. After killing Freddie Tom looks "down at Freddie's form on the floor and [feels] a sudden disgust and a sense of helplessness" (138). Unlike Dickie's murder, Tom must reflect on the murder of Freddie after it is over rather than beforehand, creating an obstacle in his usually methodical approach to life. His recovery from the murder shows his capacity to think on his feet and Tom makes it look like Freddie has passed away in a drunk driving accident. Ultimately he feels that killing Freddie was an "unnecessary" act and tells the dead Freddie that he was "a victim of [his] own dirty mind" (140-1). Tom alludes to the downfall of Americans and their filthy thoughts and "[it] may well be that Highsmith addresses her American readers when she has Tom tell his second victim" (Shannon 25) that he is a victim of his own filthy mind. In Tom's final comment toward

Freddie, Highsmith makes a social observation of the postwar feelings of American culture toward homosexuals and unclean thoughts. Due to his dirty mind, Freddie accused Tom of being gay, a statement that led to his demise. Tom resorts to senseless violence in order to restore order to his life and cleanse the impurities from his surroundings. Highsmith's innovations in the crime fiction genre shine through in the murders of Dickie and Freddie, with Tom's ambiguous motives and the fact that the reader is placed in the privileged position of the murderer and is able to watch the murders as they unfold.

### *Conclusion*

As the narrative progresses and Ripley becomes Dickie, his time in Rome suggests his need to act normal and be accepted by society. In the end of the novel he expresses a hint of remorse for the death of Dickie. His regret is out of self interest, demonstrating his egocentric nature but still worth noting since he expresses a desire for companionship: "if only he hadn't misjudged the relationship between Dickie and Marge so stupidly...he *could* have lived with Dickie for the rest of his life, traveled and lived and enjoyed living for the rest of his life" (259). Once again Highsmith alludes to his possible homosexuality, yet this passage offers an interesting twist on the theory since Tom shows what seems to be feelings of regret. In general, Tom shows little emotion, which supports the theory of him being a psychopath, but in this moment he comes close to breaking down. It is possible that Highsmith has Tom expressing this sort of emotion toward the end of the novel in order to give him a moment of weakness and clarity before he goes off to another country and escapes punishment.

Throughout the course of the novel, Tom murders two men, evades law enforcement in two different countries, and dupes countless Americans as well as Europeans. Tom embodies the Cold War notion of the enemy within, the one that no one can figure out even though they know he exists. Highsmith ends her novel with Tom's escape and the endless possibilities of sin that lie

before him, leaving the reader with the question—what’s next? In the 1950s after the novel was released one can imagine the fear and uncertainty surrounding the future of Tom and his next victims. Highsmith plays on the fears of society and alters the crime fiction genre by setting her killer loose into the wide-open space of Europe. The threat may not be at home but he is an American killer meaning there could be others like him at home even though he chooses to strike overseas.

## Conclusion

In the 1940s and 1950s, innovations in psychology such as Cleckley's study of the psychopath and the publication of the DSM-I introduced the concept of the antisocial, mentally unstable sociopath. In addition to these studies, American citizens experienced feelings of high anxiety and fear based on perceived communist and homosexual threats within the nation. Cultural fears of the communist, the homosexual, and the masked psychopath threatened a newly rejuvenated domestic sphere in the US. Patricia Highsmith played on the fears of this society in her psychological thriller novels and created works that introduced the seductive "other" who could mask his abnormal identity, commit murder, and evade punishment.

In writing *Strangers on a Train*, Highsmith debuted her first thriller that sent fear into the hearts of Americans. The thought of a man like Bruno corrupting the moral character of Guy, renewed society's concern for the masked abnormal citizen and the Cold War worries of corruption and instability at home within the United States. Highsmith's later novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), employed similar themes but it differed in its moral component. While Bruno feels the need to work with a partner and have that sense of camaraderie, Tom strictly works alone and never considers an accomplice for his murders. Tom prefers to mask himself in every way possible, not even showing his true self to good acquaintances, while Bruno revels in the fact that he can share his murderous deed with Guy. Though her first novel ends with a sense of justice, Highsmith's later novel closes with the murderer, Tom, getting off scot-free. Highsmith presents the possibility of remorse and morality in her earlier novel, but in her later novel she completely removes that sentiment demonstrating the heightened anxieties in American society and the further developed, newly professionalized notion of the psychopath. The lack of justice in the second novel

demonstrates the enhancement of the same Cold War fears of a chameleon—like “other” that developed over the five years between the two publications. In order to turn the screw on the fears of American society, Highsmith’s techniques as a crime fiction novelist evolved to create a morally ambiguous character who gets away with much more than murder – Tom Ripley embodies the terror-filled notion of a dangerous and seductive presence hidden in American life.

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