

# **The Talented Mr. Ripley Study Guide**

**The Talented Mr. Ripley by Patricia Highsmith**

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# Plot Summary

Tom Ripley is an amoral, slightly disreputable young man, with no prospects, who occasionally moves in wealthy circles. Tom is approached by affluent shipyard owner Herbert Greenleaf, the father of an acquaintance who has lived in Italy for two years. Mr. Greenleaf wants Tom to travel to Europe and convince his son Dickie to return to the U.S. Ripley is armed with a first class ticket and enough cash for two months in Europe. Tom has fantasies of adopting the luxurious lifestyle of the Greenleafs. In Italy, Tom is attracted to Dickie and jealous of his close female friend, Marge Sherwood. Marge alienates Tom further by suggesting to Dickie that Tom is homosexual, an unthinkable sin in the 1950s. Dickie becomes cold, and it is obvious that unless he comes up with a plan, Tom's days living in luxury are numbered.

Tom develops a plot to kill Dickie and assume his identity, forging Dickie's signature to checks and other financial documents. The elaborate measures Tom must take to maintain both identities never degenerate into predictable farce in Highsmith's novel. When the police suspect Dickie of committing Tom's murder, Tom stages Dickie's "death," naming Tom Ripley sole heir in the will. Highsmith's novel is a vibrant exploration of 1950s Europe, fraught with latent homosexuality, class and identity issues, and a through exploration of the character of one amoral young man.

Dickie Greenleaf is initially cold to Tom Ripley when they meet in Italy. Greenleaf does not recall their New York meeting, and is perfectly happy with the routing of his life in Mongibello, a small village south of Naples. Finally, Tom admits that Dickie's father, Mr. Greenleaf, has sent him to Italy to convince Dickie to come home. Charmed by Tom's candor, Dickie invites Tom to stay in his villa, and the two soon become close. After Tom and Dickie spend a drunken night together in a park in Rome, Dickie's girlfriend, Marge Sherwood, becomes jealous. Marge and Dickie have an argument, and Marge accuses both Dickie and Tom of being homosexual. Horrified, Dickie denies Marge's accusation, and becomes cold and unfriendly towards Tom. Tom also denies being gay, but longs to spend the rest of his life with Dickie, traveling the world.

Tom and Dickie take one final trip together, visiting Cannes and San Remo. When Dickie humiliates him, Tom thinks of murdering his friend. Lacking the moral compass that keeps most people from acting on their worst impulses, Tom decides to kill Dickie Greenleaf and assume his identity. The two look enough alike that Tom is certain he can travel on Dickie's passport if he only lightens his hair. At Tom's suggestion, the two rent a small motorboat, and Tom bludgeons Dickie to death with an oar. The boat is bloodstained, so Tom scuttles it in a deserted cove.

Tom returns to Mongibello, telling Marge that Dickie has suddenly decided to stay in Rome to study painting. Tom arranges for Dickie's house, furniture and boat to be sold, telling everyone he is acting on Dickie's behalf. In Rome, Tom assumes Dickie's identity and rents an elegant apartment. Tom continues traveling on Dickie's passport, and forging Dickie's signature to his monthly trust fund income checks, for several months.



When Freddie Miles, a close friend of Dickie's, suspects foul play, Tom kills him and dumps the body behind a tomb in Rome.

When Freddie's body and the bloodstained boat are discovered almost simultaneously, the authorities become suspicious that Dickie is a serial murderer. Since there is no legal record of Tom Ripley anywhere in the country since the trip to San Remo, the police believe he is dead. The banks in Naples and New York check their records and determine that someone is forging Dickie's signature.

Assuming the hated identity of Tom Ripley once again, Tom travels to Venice by car and convinces the authorities he has been motoring around the countryside for months. Dickie Greenleaf cannot be found, and the authorities believe he is in hiding. His father hires an American private detective to locate Dickie. When Dickie Greenleaf's luggage turns up abandoned at an American Express office, the detective, Marge and Mr. Greenleaf accept Tom's assertion that Dickie has probably killed himself. Tom forges a will he says Dickie gave him months ago, naming Tom Ripley as his sole heir. Heartbroken, the Greenleafs accede to their son's last request, and agree Tom Ripley will inherit Dickie's fortune. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is an effective exploration of the inner thoughts of a sociopath, perfectly illustrating that sometimes crime does pay.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Tom Ripley glances behind him, as he leaves the Green Cage. He is almost positive a man is following him. Should he take a chance and go to Raoul's for another drink or play it safe and try to disappear into the dark doorways on Park Avenue? Tom decides to take a chance at Raoul's. The man following him does not look like a policeman or a detective. He looks like somebody's father, a graying businessman in a suit. Tom cannot imagine the man gripping his shoulder and saying, "You're under arrest." He can't get more than 10 or 15 years in jail, anyway, and with time off for good behavior it will be much less. Surely, the man is a cop, and not just a pervert who can easily be told "no."

In Raoul's, the man introduces himself as Richard Greenleaf's father. Tom remembers Dickie Greenleaf, a tall blonde fellow with quite a bit of money. Mr. Greenleaf says he has been given Tom's name by mutual friends, the Schrievers. The last time Tom saw Charlie Schriever, a TV director, Tom was preparing the man's income tax. Schriever was thrilled with the deductions Tom uncovered. "Judging from that night, Charley could have told Mr. Greenleaf that he was intelligent, level-headed, scrupulously honest, and very willing to do a favour. It was a slight error."

According to Greenleaf, Dickie has been living in Italy for two years trying to paint. Dickie has no talent as a painter, but is a gifted boat designer. Mr. Greenleaf wants Dickie to return home, because his mother has leukemia. Tom suggests that someone might be able to convince Dickie to come home in person. Tom would go himself if his job in the accounting department of a major advertising firm did not prevent it. Tom certainly does not want to tell Greenleaf he works for the IRS. In reality, Tom is unemployed and living from week to week. Although he has a gift for mathematics, for the first time in his life, Tom is dodging the cops.

Speaking with Greenleaf, Tom exaggerates his friendship with Dickie and allows himself to be persuaded to take a leave of absence at work, and go to Europe. Once there, Tom is to convince Dickie to come home permanently. Dickie is Tom's own age, 25, and Tom can well understand his desire to live in Europe sailing his boat, spending his private income, rather than come home to work for a shipyard. Tom's heart leaps. An all-expense paid trip to Europe is ideal. He might have to leave town soon to avoid the police, anyway. Tom allows Mr. Greenleaf to buy him a brandy.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Tom Ripley is a modestly talented young man who wishes he were someone else. Despite his abilities at math, acting and forging signatures, Tom has no bank balance or job, no education and no prospects. Greenleaf's offer seems heaven-sent, especially since it allows Tom to avoid the police.



Tom quickly reveals his amoral nature through his instinctive and continual lies. Tom tells the Shrieveres he works for the Internal Revenue Service, and Greenleaf that he works for an advertising firm. All of Tom's lies up to this point have been attempts to insert himself into the world of the well-to-do, with moderate success.

Tom is clearly attracted to the tall, blonde, Dickie Greenleaf, but is even more attracted by the young man's lifestyle. Leading a carefree life in Europe, with the money to travel, sail his own boat, pursue his passion for painting and entertain guests at his villa is the life Tom imagines for himself, rather than his own lackluster existence.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Tom walks home, refusing Mr. Greenleaf's offer to drop him off in a taxi, because he does not want Greenleaf to see the dingy brownstone where he shares a furnished room with Bob Delancey, a freelance window decorator. Delancey is the only acquaintance who volunteered to put Tom up when he was without a place to stay. The smelly bathroom is down the hall, but the arrangement does make it easy for Tom to receive his mail addressed to "George McAlpin," without arousing suspicion. Tom is not surprised by Greenleaf's offer. Tom's philosophy is that something always turns up.

Lately, Tom constantly has the sensation of being followed, which he hates. He cannot help contrast his current sordid existence with the first-class cabin to Europe offered by Greenleaf. Tom feels he handled the encounter well. Greenleaf cannot possibly think Tom wrangled himself a trip to Europe at Greenleaf's expense. Mr. Greenleaf is so decent, he assumes everyone else is as well.

Tom watches himself in the mirror, as he loosens his tie. He is delighted Bob is not home. He will be able to make a clean break with New York. Tom has been invited to the Greenleaf's for dinner the next day. After the morning mail, he will take in a few art exhibits, so he will have something to discuss with the Greenleaf's at dinner. Perhaps he will also research Burke and Greenleaf Watercraft, just to show Mr. Greenleaf he is a young man on his toes. An envelope for George McAlpin is stuck in the frame of the apartment mailboxes. It contains a check for \$119.54 made out to the IRS, not George McAlpin and not cash. Tom puts the check in his jacket pocket along with the others. He has no way to cash them, so really, Tom thinks, it is more of a practical joke than a crime. The checks total \$1,863.14. Upstairs, Tom decides to try one last time for a cash payment before he goes to Italy. Tom takes one of the IRS forms out of a box. He helped himself to them a few weeks ago, when he was employed as a stockroom clerk. He sends the Notice of Error in Computation to Frederick Reddington, in the amount of \$233.76. Tom boldly strikes out the address on the form, and writes in his own. He calls first, affecting the voice of a bored but kind elderly IRS clerk, and insists payment is due immediately.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

Tom's complete lack of ethics is further revealed. He perpetuates fraud on various taxpayers, although he has no hope of monetary gain, because he has not yet figured out a way to cash the checks. The fact that he is willing to risk up to 15 years in jail for so little return suggests Tom is a compulsive liar. The squalid circumstances of Tom's life are in sharp contrast to the privileged world of the Greenleafs. There is little wonder Tom does not want Mr. Greenleaf to see his filthy neighborhood with the "Rooms to Let" signs.





Throughout the novel, Highsmith alludes to homosexuality or suggests it, rather than mentions it outright. Homosexuality was never directly acknowledged during the 1950s when *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was first published. Many of Highsmith's references are to latent homosexuality, rather than its overt expression. Bob Delancey is a department store window decorator, a stereotypically homosexual occupation, especially within the rigid job roles of the 1950s. The fact that Delancey invites Tom to live with him suggests that Delancey is interested romantically. Tom's sexual feelings are never discussed in the novel, and he may well be asexual, deriving pleasure exclusively from using other people.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Greenleaf welcomes Tom to the apartment in a voice that promises good martinis, a gourmet dinner and a bed for the night, if necessary. Mrs. Greenleaf is exactly as Tom expected, blonde, tall and slender. She holds a rather formal air, yet she's full of naive good will. Mr. Greenleaf introduces Tom as a young man who works for an insurance company, and Tom does not correct him, although he distinctly remembers telling Greenleaf he was in advertising. The only time Tom feels uncomfortable all night is when he is telling the truth - which is that his parents died when he was very young, and he was raised by an aunt in Boston.

When Tom compliments the celery remoulade appetizer, Mrs. Greenleaf admits it was Dickie's favorite. Tom jokes that maybe he can take Dickie some in his suitcase, along with the socks and robe Mrs. Greenleaf is sending her son. When Greenleaf asks where Tom went to school, he replies that he attended Princeton, but graduated from the University of Colorado in Denver. That is safe, because Tom was very friendly with a young man who was a Princeton Junior and pumped him for information. In Denver, Don Mizell was rented a room from Tom's Aunt Bea and attended the University of Colorado, so that is practically the truth. In answer to Greenleaf's inquiry, Tom says he studied accounting and English composition, two topics so dreadfully dull no one ever pursues them.

After dinner, Mrs. Greenleaf brings out the family photo albums. Tom finds them uninteresting until Dickie is 16, when he developed into his current long-legged, slim form with wavy blonde hair and a naive grin. There is a picture of Dickie in Italy with Marge Sherwood, a close female friend. Tom hates her immediately. She looks like the athletic "good egg" type.

Mr. Greenleaf has purchased Tom a round-trip, first class ticket on board a ship to Cherbourg, with a train to Paris and a sleeper train over the Alps to Rome and Naples. Mr. Greenleaf says Dickie should put Tom up at his house in Italy, but in case he does not, Mr. Greenleaf gives Tom \$600, enough for two months in Europe. Tom leaves the Greenleaf's apartment happy and excited. If he needs to hide out from the police for the next few weeks, he is sure he can stay with the Greenleafs. Tom will just tell them he suddenly had to sublet his apartment

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Tom continues to lie to the Greenleafs. When Mr. Greenleaf mistakenly says Tom is in the insurance business, Tom does not "correct" him. Tom pretends to be a much closer friend to Dickie than he really is. Virtually everything Tom tells the Greenleafs is a lie. Strangely, the only thing Tom says that is true - the fact that his was orphaned at a



young age and raised by an aunt in Boston - causes him distress. It is almost as if Tom is already moving into a new life, and his previous existence troubles him. Meanwhile, the Greenleafs give Tom a glimpse of the fine life he hopes to live someday. Tom's physical attraction to Dickie is apparent when Mrs. Greenleaf shows off the family photo albums.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The atmosphere of New York becomes increasingly unreal to Tom as the days progress. "As if when his boat left the pier on Saturday, the whole city of New York would collapse with a *poof* like a lot of cardboard on a stage." The only thing that frightens Tom is the water. He has always hated water, perhaps because his parents drowned in Boston Harbor when he was very young. Tom cannot swim.

The only time Tom has really been on a ship was working on a banana boat that sailed from New York to New Orleans and back. The seasickness was not so bad, because he was below deck most of the time. Tom stops by Marc Priminger's house for a few things he forgot. He still has his set of keys. Marc is a remarkably ugly, but wealthy, middle-aged man whose hobby is taking in penniless young men. While Tom is at the house, Marc returns with his current housemate, Joe, and is curt to Tom.

Tom visits Cleo Dobelle, his only close female friend. Cleo is tall, slim and dark-haired. She has a separate apartment in the rear of her affluent parent's large establishment. Cleo paints miniatures on tiny chips of ivory, using a magnifying glass. She frequently cooks Tom dinner, but never expects him to bring wine, flowers or candy. Tom is relieved that Cleo never seems to want or expect him to make a pass at her.

Tom picks up the socks Mrs. Greenleaf wants to send Dickie at Brooks Brothers. At her request, he picks out a maroon robe with navy piping for Dickie, as well. It is not the most handsome robe, but Tom knows it is exactly what Dickie will like. Tom gets a linen sport shirt with wooden buttons for himself. It would have been easy to charge the shirt to the Greenleaf's account, but he resists the temptation.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Tom's feeling that New York has become unreal, because he will be leaving it soon, symbolizes his attitude towards other people in general. Like many sociopaths, Tom does not really believe that other people exist in the same sense that he does. To him, they all seem to be cardboard cutouts manipulated through a landscape for Tom's benefit. Unable to feel empathy for others, Tom simply uses other people. Since other people are not "real" to Tom, he has no sense of right or wrong concerning them. Tom is truly amoral. The normal concepts of right and wrong simply have no meaning to him. Tom refrains from charging his new shirt to the Greenleaf's account, not from any moral scruples, but because he does not want them to understand his motives this early in the game.

Tom's latent homosexuality is expressed again in his relationship with Marc Priminger, who clearly adopts attractive young men for his own reasons. Tom's relationship with Cleo is entirely platonic, and rather self-centered, since she constantly entertains Tom

while he never brings gifts or reciprocates. Tom indicates he is coming to know Dickie more in his choice of the robe. While it is not one Tom would have chosen for himself, he is certain Dickie will like it, an assertion that will prove correct.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

The morning they sail gets off to a hideous start. A bunch of Bob Delancey's lousy friends show up at Tom's cabin to show him off, although he specifically told Bob he'd rather they didn't. They are exactly the kind of riffraff and slobs Tom is leaving behind. Tom is less than hospitable. He does not care if they all hate him after this. One of the girls keeps trying to stow away in his closet, and the men guffaw about the unlikely prospect of old Tom being found with a girl in his room. Tom has a private moment on deck with his friend Paul. He remembers that Paul is one of the people who believe Tom works for the Associated Press.

Tom has paid Bob half a month's rent and given him a present of a good shirt and tie. What more could he possibly want, Tom wonders. When the noisy bunch of friends finally has to go ashore, Tom is relieved. Only then does he see the huge Bon Voyage basket full of fruit, candy and liquor from the Greenleafs. It is so lovely, so unlike anything that has happened in his life before, that it brings tears to his eyes.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Bob Delaney's friends are riff raff, just as Tom himself is. Tom does not want them on board the ship, because he wants to pretend to be affluent to the other passengers. Tom's confusion over what Bob Delancey could possibly want in addition to some money, a shirt and a tie is especially telling. What Bob wants is honesty and friendship, two commodities that Tom is incapable of supplying to anyone. Quite possibly, Bob also hoped for a romantic relationship with Tom, within the constraints of 1950s moral code. Certainly, Bob's friends seem to be alluding to Tom's sexual orientation when they exclaim over the unlikelihood of anyone finding a *girl* in Tom's cabin.

The Greenleaf's Bon Voyage basket moves Tom to tears, but not by their kind regard. Tom has only seen such baskets in shop windows before. Their gift seems to be opening a door for him, on to a life that is entirely different from his old life in New York.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Tom is in a tranquil and benevolent mood during the voyage, but he remains aloof from his fellow passengers. He has a sudden yen for a cap, and buys one in the ship's store. It is marvelously versatile. With the cap, Tom can transform himself into a country gentleman, a Frenchman, a thug, an Englishman or an American eccentric. Tom amuses himself for hours in front of the mirror, affecting the role of a young man not long out of Princeton, with a private income. He writes a long letter to the Greenleafs, thanking them for the basket. To amuse himself, Tom adds a postscript that he has arrived in Italy. Tom describes the wonderful life of swimming, sailing and cafe society that he is enjoying with Dickie. Tom assures them Dickie is in no way romantically interested in Marge. When Tom is finished, the missive is ten pages long, almost all fiction, and he has to throw it away.

Tom writes a polite letter to his Aunt Dottie, telling her not to send him any more little checks. Considering how much she could afford to send if she wants to, Tom chooses to regard the checks in odd amounts like \$12.95 and \$6.48 as insults. Aunt Dottie often rubbed it in his face that his support cost more than the amount of the insurance Tom's father left. She was constantly insulting Tom, saying "Sissy! He's a sissy from the ground up, just like his father." At 17, he ran away, but they sent him back. At 20, he left again for New York, to become an actor. He had no idea the difficulties, the training or the talent that were required. Tom assumed his little one-man skits would suffice. After three rebuffs, he gave up acting.

He should have stuck with the job in the accounting department of a department store, but it just took too long to get ahead. Tom blames his Aunt Dottie for his lack of persistence. She never encouraged him as a child. One job was loading boxes of oranges on the dock. Tom was fired after two weeks, because he could not physically handle the heavy boxes all day. Tom feels that was unfair, because he tried his best. After he got fired from that job, Tom stole a loaf of bread from a delicatessen, because he believed that he deserved it. In fact, Tom believes he deserves a lot of things.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Tom's amorality is apparent in his history of theft, and his belief that the universe owes him. Tom blames all of his problems on his Aunt Dottie, who was, admittedly, not very sympathetic or supportive. She seems to have shamed both Tom and his father before him, accusing them of homosexuality with the insult "sissy." On the ship, Tom remains aloof from other passengers but tries on different identities in the privacy of his stateroom. Clearly, Tom believes he is moving on to a different life, leaving the old one behind.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Paris is just a blur of a train station and awnings, as Tom continues on his journey. Tom promises himself he will return to Paris, but now he is eager to get to Mongibello. When Tom awoke this morning on the train, he overheard two men discussing Pisa. Looking out the window, Tom saw the leaning tower. Tom had always assumed people exaggerated the Leaning Tower of Pisa, but it is all he imagined and more. Tom takes this as a portent that Italy is going to be everything he dreamed. In Naples, the hotel is imposing. Tom would be afraid if Mr. Greenleaf were not footing the bill. He mistakenly orders miniature octopus in the restaurant for dinner. The bus for Mongibello leaves the next day at 11am.

At Mongibello, Tom stops by the Post Office, asking directions to Mr. Greenleaf's house in English. The postmaster replies in Italian, with voluble directions. Tom leaves his luggage at the Post Office to pick up later. When Tom arrives at the large, two-story house with a terrace overlooking the beach, the maid tells him Signor Greenleaf has gone swimming. Tom did not bring a bathing suit, so he stops at a shop in town and buys one. All of their suits are too skimpy, but Tom finally finds a tiny black and yellow one. The shop does not sell sandals, so Tom walks towards the beach wearing his swimsuit and dress shoes, feeling ridiculous in his ghost white skin.

Tom sees Dickie a block away. His skin is tan and he is blonder than ever. Tom introduces himself and reminds Dickie they met in New York. Dickie is barely civil to Tom. Marge Sherwood is with Dickie, and insists that Dickie invite Tom to lunch at the villa. Dickie asks if Tom is renting a house for the winter, and Tom replies he is not sure. When Dickie asks where they met, Tom says at a party given by Buddy Lankenau. It is a lie, but he knows Dickie is a friend of Buddy, and Buddy is respectable.

Climbing the endless flight of stone steps to the villa, Tom is sore and sun burnt. Relaxing on the terrace with a martini, he feels better. Marge is in the kitchen, giving the maid instructions in Italian. The villa is sparsely furnished in a mixture of Italian Antiques and American Bohemian. There are several original Picasso drawings. Just as Tom is wondering if Marge lives here too, she points out her own house in the town. Tom tells Dickie he has socks and a robe from Mrs. Greenleaf in his luggage. Tom confides that the Greenleafs are worried about Dickie, but Dickie is unimpressed. Dickie insists his mother has been ill for a long while, and his father is always concerned about something. Throughout luncheon, Marge and Dickie chatter together about village events that exclude Tom.

Tom particularly admires Dickie's two rings. He wears a large rectangular green stone on the ring finger of his right hand, and an ornate signet ring on the little finger of his left hand. Tom tells Dickie that Mr. Greenleaf gave him a tour of the shipyard before he sailed. Dickie observes that, no doubt, his father offered Tom a job as well. Marge asks





what hotel Tom is staying at, and the two recommend the Miramare, the more expensive of the village's two hotels. After lunch, neither Marge nor Dickie urges Tom to stay. He wonders if they are having an affair. After consideration, Tom decides Marge is in love with Dickie, but he merely tolerates her. Walking back to the Post Office to fetch his luggage, Tom reflects that the two could hardly have been less friendly towards him.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

It is obvious that Dickie does not remember Tom and is only being polite to someone he regards as a social inferior. Dickie further stresses the difference in the two men's social standing by observing that Mr. Greenleaf probably offered Tom a job. Tom particularly envies Dickie's two rings. The green ring symbolizes wealth to Tom, and the signet ring symbolizes family and social status. Together they represent everything Tom wants but does not have access to in life. Tom continues his deception by lying to Dickie about their original meeting, claiming it was one of Dickie's upper-class friends who introduced them. It is clear that after only one meeting, Tom has developed a distaste for Marge, perhaps an indication of his disregard for women, in general.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

It is 4 p.m. by the time Tom checks into the Miramare. He hears some boys insolently cackling in Italian outside and imagines they are making unflattering remarks about him. Tom is violently sick to his stomach, then falls asleep. At 5:30 he awakes, and automatically looks out of the window at Dickie's house. He catches a glimpse of Dickie and Marge walking towards the pier. Marge is wearing a skirt and blouse instead of her bathing suit, and Tom wonders if she keeps clothes at Dickie's house. The two are going sailing, and Tom realizes it is an average day for them. Painting and writing in the morning, a late lunch, a siesta, and then sailing in the evening. Tom envies their leisurely life with plenty of money for side trips. He can certainly understand why Dickie would not want to return to a world of subways, taxis and a 9-to-5 job. Tom chastises himself for being heavy-handed and humorless in their first meeting. Nothing that is really important to him ever works out, Tom thinks. He decides to wait a few days before trying again.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Tom does not regret trying to manipulate Dickie during their first encounter; he simply regrets not doing it well enough. His envy for Dickie's lifestyle is evident. The feelings of wanting to escape subways and jobs, that Tom attributes to Dickie, are actually his own. Tom is growing jealous towards Marge, fueled by his attraction to Dickie, is apparent when he waspishly wonders if she keeps clothes at Dickie's house.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Tom lets three days go by before he appears on the beach at noon. Dickie is alone, saying Marge must be writing. He asks where Tom has been, and Tom replies he has been sick, telling the truth for once. Tom has been too weak to leave the room, although he has crawled around the floor following the patch of sun from the window, so he will not be so white. Any other energy Tom could summon up has been spent studying conversational Italian from a book he bought in the hotel lobby.

Tom invites Dickie and Marge for a drink at the hotel, using the pretext of Dickie's socks and robe. Dickie declines lunch, saying the maid has cooked something. He is very pleased with the bathrobe, as Tom knew he would be. Again, Tom confides that Mr. Greenleaf is very concerned, and Dickie says he intends to fly home for a few days in the winter, but it is his own business how he spends his life. Finally, Tom admits to Dickie that Mr. Greenleaf funded his trip for the express purpose of convincing Dickie to return to New York. It is a desperate last attempt to amuse and captivate Dickie. It works, and Dickie flashes the brilliant smile Tom remembers from New York.

The two men share a drink in the hotel bar, and Tom confides that he intends to stay in Europe and look for a job. When Dickie asks what Tom does, he replies, "Oh, I can do a number of things - valeting, baby-sitting, accounting - I've got an unfortunate talent for figures. No matter how drunk I get, I can always tell when a waiter's cheating me on a bill. I can forge a signature, fly a helicopter, handle dice, impersonate practically anybody, cook - and do a one-man show in a nightclub in case the regular entertainer's sick."

The two men go to Marge's house, and Tom is irritated at how familiar Dickie is with her bed/living room. All three return to Dickie's for lunch. Marge insists Dickie is old-fashioned about some things. He refuses to own a refrigerator, and has only a wood stove. Dickie claims it is a waster of money in a country where servants are so cheap. He opines that if Ermelinda could cook a meal in half an hour, she would have nothing to do with herself. After lunch, Dickie shows Tom his paintings. They are hideous. The one of Marge bears no resemblance to her. They are all wild, hasty terra cotta and electric blue conglomerations. The two men tour the rest of the house. Tom is delighted to find no trace of Marge's belongings in Dickie's bedroom.

Dickie invites Tom to stay with him. Tom has \$500 of Mr. Greenleaf's money left, and the two decide to use it frivolously on outings. Tom realizes that Dickie is bored, and Tom wants to spend time with him alone. He proposes a weekday trip to Naples, to see the sights. On the way to Naples the next morning, the two encounter a friend of Dickie's. Freddie Miles is a young, overweight, red-haired American. He invites Dickie to a skiing party at Cortina on December 2. The party is to last two weeks.



In Naples, the two dine in a restaurant and sit on the Galleria. On a whim, Dickie decides to hire a car to take them to Rome. They cruise the Appian Way for Tom's benefit. They take in a music hall show, view the Forum and the Coliseum. Slumped on the carrozza, each with a leg crossed, they look almost alike. Dickie is just slightly heavier. The two get drunk. At 1 a.m., a policeman wakes them in the park, demanding to see their passports. Dickie insists they did not bring their passports, because they only came outside to see the stars - a blatant lie. The two have coffee and rolls in a cafe. It is wonderful to imagine coming back when they are better dressed to see all the museums. It is wonderful to imagine lying on the beach at Mongibello.

When the two men return, Marge is annoyed they did not call to tell her they were staying overnight. Tom thinks she can imagine what she pleases. He has formed a closer bond in 24 hours with Dickie than she has in a year, simply because he is another man. Tom finds Marge's word choice and pronunciation abominable.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Tom has chosen the right tactic to captivate Dickie in admitting that Mr. Greenleaf financed his trip. It is probably the only thing that could convince Dickie to befriend the plebian young man. Dickie is also reassured by Tom's assertion that he is going to look for work in Europe. Many items on Tom's list of skills will prove useful in the future, including forgery and impersonation. Dickie likely does not realize that when Tom says he can handle dice, he means cheat at dice.

Tom's attraction to Dickie, and his jealousy of Marge, increases. By proposing a trip to Naples during the week, Tom avoids Marge's company, making it possible for him to spend time alone with Dickie. When Marge assumes the two men have spent the night together, Tom is secretly flattered.

Tom's growing attraction towards Dickie is somewhat ambivalent. He wants to possess the other man, but on another level, Tom wants to *be* Dickie. He notices how alike the two of them are in Rome. Tom is falling in love with Dickie's life and wealth, rather than with Dickie himself.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

For the next three or four days, Tom and Dickie see little of Marge. Tom spends the time amusing Dickie with funny stories about people they know in New York, some of them true. Tom has been with Dickie every minute, and knows he has not been alone with Marge. Tom writes to Mr. Greenleaf that he is staying with Dickie. He asserts that Dickie will fly home in the winter for a visit, and can likely be convinced to remain permanently at that point. Tom tells Mr. Greenleaf that when his expense money runs out, he will likely look for a job in Europe himself. This serves two purposes. It makes him appear to be an upstanding young man to Mr. Greenleaf, and it reminds him that the expense money, although generous, can run out. To enhance the effect, Tom also shows the letter to Dickie before he mails it.

Fausto, a young Italian from Milan, is hired by Dickie to tutor Tom in Italian for one hour, three times a week. Tom receives a letter from Mr. Greenleaf that must have crossed his in transit. Mr. Greenleaf reiterates his arguments for Dickie to come home. He inquires into Tom's success and demands a prompt reply. The businesslike tone disconcerts Tom. He replies that he is doing everything in his power to convince Dickie to return home, but his efforts may not be successful until Christmas. In fact, Tom and Dickie are planning to cruise the Greek islands at Christmas, and go to Majorca in January and February.

Dickie is being unusually attentive to Marge, because they are planning on leaving her alone all winter. He explains that they will be traveling on cattle boats and sleeping on decks, no life for a girl. Dickie even invites Marge to go to Herculaneum with them, but she declines, telling the "boys" to have fun. Tom imagines that after Greece, they will continue to tour, to Tangiers, Cairo, Sofia and beyond. When Tom's money from Mr. Greenleaf runs out, the two can live very comfortably on Dickie's \$500 per month trust fund.

One day, Dickie goes to see Marge, and Tom surreptitiously follows. He spies the two through a window. Dickie is kissing the girl, planting little pecks on her cheek. Tom is disgusted. He knows Dickie does not mean it, but he hates the cheap, easy, obvious way Dickie is trying to hold her friendship. Back at Dickie's house, an enraged Tom begins to throw art supplies out the window. He goes into Dickie's bedroom, wondering if the two are this minute having sex. Tom begins to try on Dickie's clothes, his gray flannel suit, striped shirt, tie, and dress shoes. Tom mimes strangling Marge in front of the mirror, wearing Dickie's clothes. Tom imagines the two making love. It would be clumsy and unsatisfactory for Dickie, but Marge would love it.

Suddenly, Dickie bursts in the door, demanding to know what Tom is doing, wearing his clothes. Dickie is furious. He and Marge have made up. Marge insists that Tom is homosexual. Dickie announces that he is not queer, and Tom vows he is also not. Tom



insists that he is one of the most innocent and clean-minded people Dickie could ever meet. Tom regrets some of the stories he told about people they both know in New York, who are "pansies." Tom says he understands that Marge loves Dickie, while Dickie feels platonically towards her. Dickie agrees, adding one must never hurt someone who loves you. He has not gone to bed with Marge, and does not intend to.

Tom retreats to the kitchen, to make himself a cup of coffee and study his Italian. He puts away their uneaten lunch. There is a new refrigerator in the kitchen, now. They spent an entire day in Naples shopping for it, with Marge and Dickie acting like newlyweds. By 5 p.m., Dickie is back to normal, giving pointers on his Italian pronunciation. Italian is the only thing Tom ever enjoyed studying, or could stick with. In another month, he will be as good as Dickie.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Again, Tom's urge to possess Dickie and to become Dickie are intertwined. When Tom is furious with Dickie, he dresses in Dickie's clothes, mimes Marge's murder and fantasizes them making love to each other. This reveals deep-seated anger and the desire to become someone else. Tom imagines the two men traveling the world together and living comfortably on Dickie's trust fund.

Tom is brutally jealous of Marge, yet on another level, Tom may wish he could become the sort of man who can make love to a woman, the sort of man who is accepted in his society. Tom may well be asexual, since no clearly physical or sexual feelings are articulated or implied. For her part, Marge has finally become jealous as well, resenting Dickie's growing intimacy with Tom.

All of these feelings are fueled by Tom's amorality and deceptions. Tom is fundamentally unable to imagine Marge, or even Dickie, as human beings with feelings as real and intense as his own. As he is incapable of empathy, Tom continues to lie to Dickie and spy on the couple.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Tom walks briskly across the terrace and into Dickie's studio. He asks Dickie if he wants to go to Paris in a coffin. Tom has met a man named Carlo in the village, a disreputable Italian who will pay them 100,000 lire each to pretend they are corpses. Tom thinks the scheme has something to do with drugs. Dickie insists Tom must have misunderstood the man's Italian, so the two go to the bar to find Carlo. Carlo proves to be an unwashed but freshly shaven minor thug with dirty nails. He takes one look at Dickie's tan, worn but expensive Italian clothes and American rings, and decides Dickie is not the man for the job. Dickie ridicules Tom for the suggestion, but Tom insists a month ago, in Rome, Dickie would have accepted. Dickie calls the man a dirty crook, and Tom says Dickie is rude. Tom walks away, seeing Dickie's eyes as an emotionless mirror. He realizes he is losing Dickie. They are no longer friends. Dickie does not even want Tom to go to Freddy Mile's party in Cortina with him.

Tom receives a businesslike letter from Mr. Greenleaf, dismissing him. Tom, at least, feels proud that he did not try to manipulate the older man into giving him more money.

Anybody else, Tom thinks, would have. Dickie received a letter from Mr. Greenleaf just a day or two ago. Unlike previous letters, he did not read the entire thing aloud to Tom. Tom suspects part of the letter was about him. Tom tries to make amends to Dickie by suggesting they take Marge to Paris with them, but Dickie says he'd rather go to San Remo or Genoa now, save his energy for Cortina. Yesterday, Dickie asked Tom if he was going home for Christmas, although Dickie knows very well that Tom has no home to go to. For the first time in his life, Tom feels like an unwanted guest. He will just have to endure Christmas with Dickie and Marge.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Tom's fantasies of spending his life with Dickie are interrupted by the Carlo incident. The fact that Tom was so willing to do something clearly illegal for the equivalent of about \$300, clearly delineates the differences in the morals and class of the two men. Carlo, after all, is not very different from Tom when he was in New York, and Tom resents his friend's attitude. By condemning Carlo, Dickie is condemning Tom.

Tom assumes that everyone else is as amoral as he is. He is quite proud of himself for not extorting more money from Mr. Greenleaf, although he had made overtures in that direction. Tom's attempts to drive a wedge between Marge and Dickie have actually brought them closer together. With Mr. Greenleaf's dismissal, any hopes Tom has of a personal relationship with Dickie are quickly fading.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Marge does not want to go to San Remo with Tom and Dickie, because her writing is going so well. She asks them to find her special Stradivari perfume that they could not locate in Naples. Tom dreads spending the whole day looking for it in San Remo, as they did in Naples. The two men share one of Dickie's suitcases, since they are only going for four days. Dickie is slightly more cheerful, but there is an awful air of finality about the trip. He acts overly polite, like a host who loathes his guest, and realizes the guest knows it. For the first time, Tom feels unwelcome and boring. On the train to San Remo, Dickie tells Tom he intends to go to Cortina alone, and with Marge.

At the last minute, the two men decide to stay on the train and go to Nice and Cannes, instead. They both have their passports, so getting into France is no problem. They arrive at Cannes at 11 p.m., and check into a chic but modestly priced hotel at Dickie's request. After breakfast in a cafe, they walk through town with their swimming trunks under their clothes. It is cool, but they have swum in colder weather in Mongibello.

At the beach, Tom watches a troupe of acrobats rehearsing a human pyramid. The topmost man is a boy of 17, lithe as a tiger. Dickie makes a caustic remark about the acrobats being fairies. It reminds Tom of his Aunt constantly calling him a "sissy." Dickie goes back to the hotel and urges Tom to stay and watch the acrobats. Tom is deeply offended, wondering if Dickie has never seen a "pansy" before. The two leave for San Remo just before 3 p.m. to avoid paying another 10 dollars for the hotel, at Dickie's urging. Tom pays the hotel bill, as well as the rail tickets, although he knows Dickie has plenty of francs. Dickie cashed his monthly check in francs, hoping to make some money on the exchange to lire.

Dickie is silent on the train. Tom thinks that he should steal Dickie's green stone ring when he leaves. It would be easy to do, since Dickie takes it off when he swims or showers. Tom feels mingled hate, affection and frustration with Dickie. Tom wants to kill him. Of course, Tom has felt that way before, but it has only lasted for a moment, when he was angry. This feeling lasts, however. Tom blames Dickie for shoving him out in the cold, being inhumanly stubborn and rude. Suddenly, Tom has a brilliant thought. He can kill Dickie and become Dickie Greenleaf himself. The two look enough alike that he can use Dickie's passport, especially if he lightens his hair a little. He can collect Dickie's things in Mongibello, tell Marge some story, and get an apartment in Paris or Rome. He can forge Dickie's signature on his monthly check. Vaguely, Tom realizes the danger and inevitable temporariness of this strategy, but he begins to focus on how to bring it about.

Tom imagines killing him in water, but he does not want to shove Dickie off a cliff. He is afraid Dickie will grab him at the last minute, and they will both die. San Remo is full of flowers. Tom suggests they take a little boat out. Dickie has rented a small motorboat





here before, with Marge or friends. There is a single oar in the bottom of the boat. Dickie steers the boat straight out to sea for an hour, until they are out of sight of the land and other boats. The two men dare each other to go in the cold water. As Dickie takes his trousers off, Tom hefts the oar. Suddenly, he wants to hit or kiss Dickie, or knock him overboard. Tom is afraid he will fail, but he knows he is going to try. He hits Dickie on top of the head with the oar. Dickie calls out groggily, and Tom brings the oar down again with all his strength. Dickie mumbles and loses consciousness. Tom keeps striking him until he is quite still and limp.

Tom yanks off Dickie's green ring, and his signet ring. He empties the pockets of Dickie's jacket - his keys, cigarettes and lighter, alligator wallet, Marge's perfume. Tom unties the anchor and ties it around Dickie's legs with a clumsy knot. He is sure it is heavy enough to keep the body down, forever. Struggling, Tom manages to get the body overboard, but falls in himself. On the way, he hits the control on the outboard motor, and the engine revs. The motorboat starts spinning crazily in circles. Tom manages to lean over the side and turn the motor off. The bottom of the boat is all bloody. Tom realizes he can never return it. He checks, finding the rings still in his pocket. Tom steers the boat to a secluded cove. He fills it with rocks and sinks the boat just offshore.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Dickie has served his purpose for Tom, who has no more use for him. Tom is deeply wounded by Dickie's condemnation of the homosexual acrobats, because Dickie clearly extends that disgust to Tom himself. Highsmith's novel is partly a commentary on the fact that in the 1950s, homosexuality was not an option that could actively be considered, even though both Tom and Dickie are apparently gay. Furious, Tom considers taking Dickie's rings. The rings symbolize Dickie's wealth, status and good family. It is a short leap from fantasizing about stealing the rings, to Tom's imagining himself assuming Dickie's identity. For a few seconds in the boat, Tom imagines kissing Dickie, but he realizes the man loathes him. Now that Tom realizes he will never possess Dickie, he focuses on an alternate plan - becoming Dickie himself.

While most people might consider murder in a fleeting moment of rage, Tom has no moral compass. Murder is no more wrong to him than tax fraud, spending Mr. Greenleaf's money under false pretenses or conning friends into providing a place to live. All of these tactics are, to Tom, simply smarter ways to make a living than working at a job.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Tom returns to San Remo just at sundown, when the entire populace is apparently gathered at the sidewalk cafes. He walks through town wearing his swimming suit, sandals and Dickie's corduroy jacket, holding a wadded bundle of their bloody clothes in his hand. Tom is so exhausted it is easy to act casual. He has five espressos and three brandies in a bar near the cove. Now, he plays the role of an athletic young man out swimming, despite the cold.

Back at the hotel, Tom allows himself to rest an hour, but not to sleep. He packs Dickie's things just as Dickie always did. Tom's own jacket is ruined, but Dickie's is almost identical and fits just as well. Tom settles the hotel bill and takes the 10:24 p.m. train south to Rome, changing to Naples. The white, taut sheets of the berth are the most luxurious sight he has ever seen. Tom imagines all the pleasures ahead of him with Dickie's money. These will be years of freedom, years of pleasure.

In the Naples train station, Tom discards Dickie's hairbrush and toothbrush, and their bloody clothes, in the men's room. He catches the bus to Mongibello. Just as Tom steps off the bus, he encounters Marge on her way to the beach. Marge immediately asks where Dickie is. Tom replies that Dickie has decided to remain in Rome a few days to visit art exhibits, and for a change of scenery. Dickie has sent Tom to pick up a few of his things. Tom gives Marge the bottle of perfume Dickie purchased for her. Marge is ill at ease with Tom. She obviously prefers him not to be alone in Dickie's house, and accompanies him, making herself at home. When she asks which hotel Dickie is staying at in Rome, Tom says he does not know, but Dickie said to use the American Express office for mail.

Tom takes a shower and puts on Dickie's old white duck trousers. After Marge leaves, he begins to load Dickie's biggest suitcases with his best clothes. Tom is preoccupied, thinking about what items to leave for Marge and how to dispose of the rest. Marge can have the refrigerator. Signor Pucci in the village will act as Dickie's agent to sell the valuable furnishings, the house itself, and the boat at bargain prices. Tom decides it will be wiser to pretend Dickie made the decision later to remain in Rome permanently.

The next day, Tom loads a large box with Dickie's best drawings and finest linen. He is prepared for Marge to pop in any minute, but she does not arrive until after 4 p.m. Tom announces he has received a letter from Dickie, who has decided to stay in Rome permanently. Marge forlornly protests. Is Dickie not coming back to Mongibello all winter? Tom assures her Dickie will not be going to Cortina, but Marge can still go without him. Tom can see Marge is wondering if Tom and Dickie will be living together in Rome. Tom assures her he will be returning to the U.S. in mid-December. Dickie just wants some time alone, he insists.



Tom has privately decided to break up with Marge gently, as Dickie would, by letter. Then, if Marge hears no more from Dickie, she will assume he is off with Tom Ripley. Tom searches the Naples newspaper for an item about a sunken motorboat filled with blood, but finds nothing. At 6 o'clock, he takes a taxi to Naples, telling everyone in the village that Signor Greenleaf has decided to winter in Rome.

Using Dickie's typewriter, a Hermes Baby, Tom writes a letter to Marge as Dickie. He says he is studying in Rome with a penniless old painter named Di Massimo, and tells her to direct any letters to the American Express office. Tom forges Dickie's huge, ornate signature on the letter, and checks into a hotel using Dickie's passport. He buys a few items of make-up at a pharmacy, inventing a story about a wife indisposed with diarrhea for the salesgirl. Tom goes back to the hotel and practices Dickie's signature all evening. The next check from Dickie's bank is due to arrive in less than 10 days.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Tom's amorality is illustrated in his cool actions covering up the murder. He never suffers a single guilty thought about depriving a friend of his life. Killing Dickie has not only allowed Tom access to wealth, but allows him to assume the type of identity he has always coveted. As Dickie, Tom moves across the world as if an actor on a stage. He interacts easily with the affluent, and is accepted by them. Tom enhances the illusion by acting exactly as Dickie would, even packing his suitcase the same way. Tom has not only robbed Dickie, but he has assumed his identity in every particular, shedding the faintly disreputable aura of failure that clings to Tom Ripley. In his guise as Dickie, Tom increasingly thinks of himself in the third person.

Tom is as frightened that Marge will believe he and Dickie are a homosexual couple living together, as he is that she will somehow uncover the murder. Although he wants Marge to believe Tom is much closer to Dickie than she is, he accepts his society's negative stereotypes of men who have sexual relationships, and abhors the implication.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

In Rome, Tom uses Dickie's passport to register at the Hotel Europa, a moderately priced establishment near the Via Veneto. He avoids the flashier Hassler, patronized by people like Freddie Miles, who knew Dickie. Tom rehearses extensively, practicing conversations with Marge, Fausto and Freddie over the phone as Dickie. He also rehearses quickly switching back into Tom Ripley, in case one of them shows up in person. He keeps a few sets of Tom's clothes in the closet, and is ready to take off Dickie's rings at any time. He finds it easy to forget the exact timbre of Tom Ripley's voice, since he is constantly using Dickie's voice now. He even practices dancing like Dickie, gliding somewhat clumsily across the floor with a woman. Tom finds it impossible to be lonely or bored as long as he is Dickie Greenleaf.

Marge sends a letter to Dickie, telling him Tom is just using him. Tom uses Dickie's Hermes Baby typewriter to write a breezy, affectionate letter to Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf. Tom once saw a half-finished letter Dickie was writing to his parents, so he knows exactly the style. In a few days, he is off to Paris, staying in a hotel recommended as not being too full of Americans. In Paris, Tom orders a fine a l'eau, which Dickie once told him was his usual drink when in France. Tom forsakes the make-up, finding the most important part of impersonation is the facial expression. He revels in Dickie's wonderful cuff links and white silk shirts.

On Christmas Eve, Tom/Dickie is invited to a party by a French girl and her American fiancy. In the huge, chilly hall, Tom meets half a dozen counts and countesses. He is as pleasant as possible to everyone, and by the end of the evening, he is invited to three more parties. He declines, realizing it is only a matter of time until he will encounter another guest who knows Dickie very well. On his way out, Tom suddenly remembers Freddie Miles's party in Cortina a month ago. He has completely forgotten to send a letter canceling. Tom promises himself not to make such a mistake again.

In Rome on January 4, Dickie receives two letters from Marge. She is returning to the States, and hopes she can see Dickie before she leaves. She invites him to go home with her, on the same boat. Tom/Dickie writes her a nice letter, uneasy that she will try to see Dickie in Rome before her departure. He tells her he just spent 3 weeks alone in Paris, and that Tom left Rome a month ago. Marge writes back thanking him for the beautiful silk blouse, he sent from Paris. He supposes her good humor is due to her belief that Tom is safely out of the picture.

Tom does not intend to spend the winter in Rome, he just wants an apartment as a home base, something he has never had. Signor Pucci sends a message that he has sold the furniture for the equivalent of \$200. Tom, as Dickie, celebrates with an excellent dinner alone in a nightclub, concentrating on being Dickie Greenleaf. Dickie has two bank accounts, one in New York and one in Naples, with about \$5,000 in each account.



He should open a bank account for Tom Ripley, and put a few thousand in it, along with the furniture money. After all, he thinks, he has two people to take care of now.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Tom is finally living the life he dreamt of on the ship. His assumption of Dickie's life is complete. He even imitates Dickie's flaws, dancing poorly and avoiding flashy hotels, as Dickie did. It would have been far safer for Tom to simply go to Greece, where neither Dickie nor Tom Ripley is known. However, Tom is much more interested in living the good life afforded by Dickie's identity, than he is in escaping prosecution for murder. The theft of Dickie's very essence, his identity, is a greater crime than his death. To Tom, neither seems a crime. He is simply finally living the life he deserves. Concealing his latent homosexuality further complicates the deception. To forestall any suspicions of homosexuality that Marge may harbor, Dickie tells her Tom Ripley has left Rome weeks ago.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Tom/ Dickie visits the museums in Rome, and takes 6 Italian lessons from an old man. Tom judges his Italian is as good as Dickie's, and resolves not to study it any more. He buys a few minor items to embellish the apartment, although he intends to never ask anyone up. He does invite one attractive but not very smart young American he met at Cafy Greco up for a drink, just to impress him for an hour. Tom intends to never see the young man again, who is leaving for Munich the following day.

As Dickie, Tom studiously avoids the American residents of Rome. He has a long conversation with a painter named Carlino he met in a tavern, describing Dickie's imaginary painting tutor, Di Massimo, vividly. Should the police ever have occasion to question the fellow, he will be able to swear absolutely that Di Massimo exists. Tom realizes that eventually Dickie will have to disappear and become Tom Ripley again. For now, he enjoys feeling the entire world is his audience. Tom even completes a painting in Dickie's manner.

Marge sends a letter forlornly asking if Dickie wants a muffler or socks, because she has plenty of time to knit. Tom/Dickie replies that he is giving up his apartment in Rome and going to Sicily with Di Massimo. Tom/Dickie has a ticket by train to Naples, boat to Palma and on to Majorca on January 31. He buys two new Gucci suitcases with Dickie's initials on them, and throws the shabbier of Tom Ripley's suitcases away. Although he checks the papers every day, there is no mention of a scuttled motorboat found in San Remo.

Tom/ Dickie is packing the suitcases one morning when the doorbell rings repeatedly. He cannot imagine who it could be, since he never invites people home. No one even knows where Dickie lives. He is wearing one of Dickie's sport shirts, with seahorses, over his own shirt. Annoyed, Tom opens the door a few inches to find himself confronted by Freddie Miles. Freddie asks for Dickie and Tom says he is not home, casually taking off Dickie's shirt and rings as he speaks. Freddie questions Tom. Is he staying with Dickie? No, Tom replies, he is just visiting for a few hours. Dickie is out to lunch. Freddie reveals that the Italian couple who takes care of the building, the Buffis, let him in. They insisted Mr. Greenleaf was at home. Freddie recognizes Tom from Mongibello. He got Dickie's address from an Italian boy at the Greco.

Suddenly, Freddie notices that Tom is wearing Dickie's shoes, and his silver I.D. bracelet. Freddie's eyes change, and his expression becomes suspicious and knowing all at once. He suspects Tom and Dickie are lovers. Tom senses danger. Freddy would be exactly the type to beat up a "pansy," especially if no one were around, and he was confident he could get away with it. Freddie knowingly asks if Tom lives with Dickie, and Tom protests that he does not. Freddie sarcastically notes that Dickie has certainly loaded Tom up with all his jewelry. Hurriedly, Tom shows Freddie out.



Downstairs, Tom can hear Freddie talking with Signora Buffi, who insists only Mr. Greenleaf lives in the apartment, and he is at home. Freddie is soon back at the door, again, demanding to know what is going on. Tom realizes in minutes, Freddie will drag him downstairs where Signora Buffi will identify him as Mr. Greenleaf, and the ruse will be over. Tom grabs a heavy glass ashtray, and opens the door for Freddie, who demands an explanation. Tom bashes Freddie in the center of the forehead with the ashtray, and keeps hitting him until Freddie is dead.

Tom is filled with disgust and helplessness, that Freddie would force him to do such a thing. It is only 12:40, hours until dark. Tom goes through Freddie's pockets, and finds the keys to Freddie's 1955 fiat, which is parked on the street. Tom gets out gin, vermouth and Pernod. He soils two glasses, and fills up ashtrays as though the two men had been smoking all afternoon. Tom knows the mess will be cleaned up long before the police arrive, but feels he can act the part better if he believes it himself. Freddie will have left by 7 o'clock, and Dickie, neat even after a few drinks, will have everything cleaned up by 8 o'clock. Tom tunes the radio to dance music, to heighten the illusion.

He will be on the train to Naples and Palma at 10:30 tomorrow morning, unless the police detain him. Tom is furious at Freddie, the selfish stupid bastard sneering at one of his best friends, because he suspects sexual deviation. "He looked at Freddie and said low and bitterly: 'Freddie Miles, you're a victim of your own dirty mind.'"

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Tom is unable to resist impressing an attractive young American man by inviting him to Dickie's sumptuous apartment for a drink. The young man turns out to be very much like Tom, himself, in his New York days. He is actually an Italian, and the story about going to Munich the next day was a ruse. The young man seems to be poised to take advantage of Tom/Dickie, in any way he can.

The situation with Freddie becomes a crisis, not when Freddy suspects Tom of murder, but when he suspects him of homosexuality. One of Highsmith's primary themes is that in the milieu of the 1950s, homosexuality was a greater crime than murder. Freddie's discovery that Tom is wearing Dickie's I.D. bracelet is particularly incriminating. It was common, during the period, for a man to give his girlfriend his I.D. bracelet as a token of commitment, that they were "going steady." This is the conclusion Freddie leaps to, when he sees the bracelet on Tom's wrist.

In Tom's amorality, he blames Freddie for his own death. Tom does not give a thought to the fact that he now has deprived a second person of their life. It never crosses his mind that Freddie will never laugh or love again, or that he undoubtedly has friends and relatives who will miss him. Instead, Tom sees his actions as being caused by Freddie himself.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Tom/ Dickie waits until nearly 8 p.m., when fewer people are on the streets. He covers Freddie's bloody head with one of Dickie's hats, and checks that Signora Buffi is not in the downstairs hallway. He splashes gin and Pernod on the front of Freddie's shirt, and hoists Freddie as if he is helping a drunken friend, draping one of Freddie's arms over his shoulder. Tom has spent most of the afternoon drinking gin and Pernod, so he has intoxicated enough to act casual transporting a dead body.

Tom stumbles downstairs struggling under the immense weight of Freddie's body. Three or four bystanders walk past just as Tom reaches the street, but no one notices. Tom thinks that is the great thing about Europe; no one meddles. In American, three people would have stopped to help him by now. Just then, a man asks Tom in Italian if he needs any help. Tom replies drunkenly in English that he is fine, his friend has just had a bit too much to drink. At the car, Tom dumps Freddie in the passenger seat, where he looks almost, but not quite, natural.

Tom dons the brown leather gloves he has brought in his pocket, and drives Freddie's Fiat to the Via Apria Antica. He dumps the body behind an unprepossessing tomb, keeping the wallet and Italian money. During the afternoon, Tom burns a Swiss 20-franc note and some Austrian schilling notes he found in the wallet. Tom leaves the car and walks home. He thinks that a real thief would have taken Freddie's warm coat and passport, as well. Then he decides that not all thieves behave logically, so it is probably all right, after all.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Tom dispassionately sits drinking in the apartment all afternoon with Freddie's dead body, while he plots the disposal of the corpse. He never thinks about Freddie's friends and family, or the life he might have had. The risk of Freddie accusing him of impersonating Dickie Greenleaf, or even worse, of being Dickie Greenleaf's lover, is simply too great.





# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Tom goes out before 8 a.m. to buy the Italian papers. He hopes it will be many days before Freddie's body is discovered behind the tomb. Tom has a terrible hangover, although he did not really drink that much. He knows it is simply because he intends to tell the police, if they ask, that he drank a great deal yesterday with Freddie. Whenever Tom prepares a lie, he begins to believe it himself.

Tom/Dickie continues packing for Majorca and tells Signora Buffi he will be gone at least 3 weeks. Just as he is getting ready to go to the train station, the phone rings. It is the police. They inform Tom/Dickie that his friend Freddie Miles has been murdered. The police know Freddie was with Dickie yesterday, and want to ask him some questions. Tom insists he has got a train to catch, but the police demand that he wait for their arrival.

Tom/Dickie is at the easel, working on a painting when the police arrive. There are an older man in the uniform of a police officer and a younger man in a policeman's uniform. Tom/Dickie tells the police he and Freddie had drinks yesterday from noon to about 6 p.m., when Freddie left by auto for another appointment. Tom is convinced that this is the absolute truth. The police insist Freddie must have been robbed and killed shortly after leaving Dickie's apartment, perhaps by a hitchhiker he picked up. They are not at all suspicious of Tom/Dickie, but they insist he remain in Italy to answer further questions for a few days. Tom realizes that Dickie's name and current address will be in the paper. To avoid unexpected visits from people who will recognize Dickie, he must leave. Tom checks into the deluxe Ingleterra hotel, using Dickie's passport. After Van Houston, a friend of Freddie's calls, Tom/Dickie asks the desk to hold all calls except the police.

All the papers have prominent stories about the murder of a wealthy American. Even worse, there is a story about an abandoned motorboat found sunken in San Remo. The bottom of the boat is covered in what are suspected to be bloodstains. The police are making inquiries. Tom realizes that if the police check the San Remo hotel registers for the date the boat was rented, they will realize that Dickie Greenleaf and Tom Ripley were there. They will also learn that Tom Ripley has not been seen since, and may suspect that Dickie Greenleaf murdered his friend. What if they find the body? They will likely believe it is the body of Tom Ripley. Tom assures himself this is merely a momentary inconvenience, and all will be smooth sailing again, soon.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

Even as his plot comes unraveled, Tom is incapable of empathy towards Dickie or Freddie, and can only think of his own safety and comfort. He is secure in the Dickie



Greenleaf identity, sure that once the current tempest blows over, he will be able to maintain Dickie's life again. The recovery of the boat at this precise time symbolizes Tom's previous sins coming back to haunt him. Tom regrets the necessity for killing Freddie, only because it interrupted his calm existence. He blames Freddie's own character flaws for the murder, which Tom mentally attributes to Dickie Greenleaf, not himself.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

As soon as Tom wakes up, he thinks of Marge. He has had no message from her in a day, and has a horrible premonition that she will be on the next train to Rome. Soon, Tom recovers his equilibrium. He has always been able to handle Marge. After breakfast, the phone rings. It is the police. Shortly after, the same officer appears, with a different young policeman. They want to know the whereabouts of Dickie Greenleaf's friend, Thomas Ripley. As Dickie, Tom tells them his friend went back to the States about a month ago. The police show no record of Tom Ripley after San Remo at all. It seems very suspicious that Dickie Greenleaf now has two friends who may have been murdered, although the police are still being polite. Tom/Dickie asks if he can travel to Palermo, in southern Italy, and the police give their permission, as long as he remains in the country.

The phone rings immediately after the police leave. It is Marge. Tom speaks to her in his Tom Ripley voice and hurriedly makes an excuse why he cannot see her. He says he is expecting someone to interview him for a job shortly. Tom asks Marge to wait for him across the street at a bar called Angelo's. He quickly checks out of the hotel, and stops by the American Express office to pick up Dickie's mail. If he has to leave the country quickly, he will do so as Tom Ripley, and become Dickie Greenleaf again later.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Ironically, Tom's actions have cast police suspicion on Dickie Greenleaf instead of Tom Ripley. Tom has been having so much fun living as Dickie, he has abandoned the Tom Ripley identity entirely, except around people who know Dickie intimately. As a result, there are no hotel records or passport crossings to indicate that Tom Ripley is still alive. Tom's ruse has been so effective, the police suspect Dickie Greenleaf of killing Tom Ripley in the motorboat, not the other way around. The police even seem to suspect that Dickie's relationship with Freddie and/or Tom was homosexual, a motive for murder in their opinion. Despite the complications, Tom continues to lie successfully, because he lacks the compunctions a moral person would feel.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

When Tom/Dickie gets off the boat in Palermo, he is relieved that there are no police on the dock to arrest him. There is also no message from the Roman police at the hotel. If only Dickie could have remained happy with Tom, he thinks, none of this would ever have happened. The two of them could have been happy together forever. As it was, Tom feels he had no choice but to kill Dickie. He considers writing Marge a letter telling her bluntly that Dickie is much happier with Tom than he ever was with Marge. Instead, Tom/Dickie types a long letter to the Greenleafs in New York about the unfortunate demise of Freddie Miles, who the Greenleafs know slightly. At one time, Tom/Dickie assumed he would soon have the Greenleafs eating out of his hand, supplementing his income with additional thousands. To Tom's disappointment, that has not occurred.

The thought of visiting Greece as shy, penniless Tom Ripley is utterly repulsive to him. Dickie receives a long letter from Marge. She says she finally understands that Dickie and Tom are together, and only wishes Dickie had the courage to tell her so directly. She has informed the authorities in Rome that Tom Ripley is with Dickie in Palermo, in retaliation for Dickie's betrayal. The Palermo police call and ask if Mr. Thomas Ripley is with Dickie in Palermo. When Dickie insists he is alone, the police seem doubtful. Tom realizes it may soon become more dangerous to be Dickie than to be Tom. He hides Dickie's passport in the lining of his Gucci case.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The issues of identity and homosexuality seem to have intertwined for Tom. His latent homosexuality and attraction to Dickie have transformed into autoeroticism. Instead of being with Dickie, he has become his beloved, much more effectively than he ever was Tom Ripley. The thought of assuming the Tom Ripley identity permanently is now repulsive to him. Although Tom, as Dickie, has access to Dickie's trust fund income and bank accounts, he wants even more money from the Greenleafs. He also wants to remain Dickie Greenleaf indefinitely.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

Tom/ Dickie spends five calm, solitary days wandering in Palermo. When he first became Dickie Greenleaf, Tom imagined a new circle of friends. Instead, he has become lonely, avoiding anyone who could possibly know Dickie.

As if things were not bad enough, Dickie receives letters from his banks in Naples and New York. An expert at the New York bank suspects the signature on Dickie's January check to have been forged. Tom is furious. It should take months for them to uncover the forgery, and it has only been four weeks. Tom immediately writes both banks as Dickie, and insists the signatures are genuine. He carefully forges the signatures on the letters, making sure they are perfect. The Naples bank demands that Dickie appear in person to verify the signatures. This especially frightens Tom, as Dickie was at the bank in Naples many times, and someone there is likely to realize Tom is not Dickie, despite the resemblance.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Tom fantasized about social acceptance as Dickie Greenleaf. Instead, he has found isolation. He must avoid anyone who knows Dickie, or who may have friends who know Dickie, which seems to include most well-to-do English-speaking people in Europe.

The identity issues become even more problematic, as the Naples bank demands that Dickie appears in person. Dickie is well-known in Naples, and Tom is likely to encounter people who realize he is not Signor Greenleaf. If the banks continue to suspect forgery, Tom will lose access to Dickie's considerable fortune. Worse, to Tom, he will have to return to the dreary identity of Tom Ripley.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Dickie receives a threatening letter from a police captain in Rome, demanding he return to Rome to assist in inquiries regarding the disappearance of Thomas Phelps Ripley. While he packs, Tom thinks of a plan. He will travel to Milan or Turin and buy a used car with high mileage in Tom Ripley's name. He can pretend he has been touring northern Italy by car for the past several months, sleeping in his auto. That will explain the lack of records for Tom Ripley.

Tom hates being Tom Ripley, a "nobody," who is incompetent, clownish, and good only for a few minutes of entertainment. He hates assuming his old habits and feeling people look down on him. Tom hates to lose Dickie's things. He mentally numerates the ones that do not have initials, which he can keep. Suddenly, Tom has an inspiration. He will leave Dickie's bags at the American Express office in Venice. At least that way, if it becomes safe to assume Dickie's identity again, he won't have lost all the expensive shirts and cuff links. Assuring himself that this will all blow over and everything will be safe again, Tom keeps Dickie's rings in a leather box in the bottom of his suitcase.

Tom takes the train through Naples and Florence to Trento. Avoiding the bigger towns, he buys a used car and applies for the license plates in Trento, where he checks into a hotel using the Tom Ripley's passport. To Tom's shock, after six hours in the hotel, he still has not been contacted by the police. Tom buys a guidebook and marks it up, breaking the spine. He decides to drive to Venice.

Tom has always avoided Venice, expecting to be disappointed. Instead, he finds it wonderful. The motor launches are as fast and efficient as trains. One can walk everywhere in the city, and the lack of cars gives it a human scale. As Dickie, he cashed \$1,000 worth of traveler's checks just before he left Palermo, so for once, the unassuming, penny-pinching Tom Ripley treats himself to dinner in an expensive restaurant. Tom sees a small item in the paper that mentions Tom Ripley is believed missing by the police, but decides not to react too soon. He decides to exaggerate the Tom Ripley persona, assuming more of a stoop, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and dying his hair an even darker shade. " Being Tom Ripley had one compensation, at least: it relieved his mind of guilt for the stupid, unnecessary murder of Freddie Miles."

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Dickie's rings symbolize everything that Tom Ripley does not possess - family, fortune, entree into the highest echelon of society, and social finesse. They are at the heart of the transformation from shy, mousy Tom Ripley to handsome, confident Dickie Greenleaf. Tom refuses to abandon these hard-won prizes, although they endanger his very life.



Tom demonstrates his amorality in his constant conniving to go undetected. While many others would be preoccupied with the nature of their crimes, Tom is solely concerned with escaping detection. To that end, he decides to make Tom Ripley even less likeable than before. In returning to the Tom Ripley identity, he becomes a caricature of himself. Tom is completely without sexual feelings at this point. All of his energy is involved in becoming Dickie Greenleaf, avoiding detection, and a preoccupation with Dickie's belongings.

Changing identities to Tom Ripley has one salubrious effect. Tom believes that Dickie Greenleaf is responsible for the murder of Freddie Miles, so in changing identities he sheds any guilt he may feel, however slight.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

The next morning, there is a long article in the paper about Dickie Greenleaf and the missing Tom Ripley, and Tom feels he can avoid the issue no longer. According to the paper, Dickie is under suspicion for Freddie Miles's murder, and suspected of hiding over the forged checks. Two of three experts summoned by the Naples bank now agree that both the January and February checks are forged. Tom is happy to note that according to the police, they actually have no evidence against Dickie, other than his untimely disappearance.

Tom considers it the saddest day in his life, when he has to walk into the Venetian police station and identify himself as Tom Ripley. The Rome police send someone to interview him. It is Tenente Rovassini, the same officer as before. Tom intentionally hangs his head and makes his Italian clumsy. He explains he has been traveling by car around the countryside. Tom asks if his friend Dickie Greenleaf is really suspected of murder, and Tenente Rovassini exclaims "no," and says that the police merely wish to speak to him. A man has reported seeing two men outside Dickie Greenleaf's apartment the day of Freddie's murder. One was drunk, or possibly dead, being helped into a car. This contradicts Dickie's statement that Freddie was not very drunk when he left, and the police would like to straighten the matter up. Tenente Rovassini also delicately probes to see if perhaps both Freddie and Dickie were in love with this girl, Marge Sherwood. Tom protests in a way that will heighten the officer's suspicions.

That night, Tom treats himself to an excellent dinner. While he is enjoying it, a brilliant idea comes to him. What if Tom had an envelope containing a will signed by Dickie Greenleaf, leaving everything he owns to Tom Ripley? What if the envelope had instructions on it, not to open for several months? Tom celebrates his new plan.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

Despite Tom's reversion to Tom Ripley's shy, clumsy, self-effacing persona, he is unable to give up some of Dickie's habits, including dinner at fine restaurants and staying at lavish hotels. Tom's insecurity and self-loathing is fully revealed when he deems the day he identifies himself as Tom Ripley as the saddest day in his life. Tom is symbolically not only returning to his former existence as an ugly duckling, but also abandoning the only man he ever truly loved - himself, as Dickie Greenleaf. Ironically, by appearing as Tom Ripley, he clears Dickie of any suspicion in the disappearance of Tom Ripley. While he is scheming to make the Dickie Greenleaf identity viable in the future, Tom hits on an alternate plan to legally gain access to Greenleaf's fortune.





# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Tom writes to Mr. Greenleaf about the last time he saw Dickie, who is now officially considered either missing, or hiding from the authorities. Tom says he last saw Dickie around February 2 in Rome. Dickie seemed depressed, and Tom fears he has killed himself, or gone into hiding. Tom also writes a friendly letter to Marge, inviting her to Venice, although she declines. The *Oggi* newspaper is running a life story of Dickie Greenleaf, spread over two weeks. Many papers speculate that Signor Greenleaf has fled to Tahiti, South America or Mexico.

Tom rents a palazzo on the canal in Venice. The only remotely modern part of the building is the bathroom. He types Dickie's will, bequeathing his trust fund and all his worldly possessions to his good friend, Tom Ripley. Tom decides not to risk trying to get a witness to the will. He has read somewhere that holographic will need not be witnessed. He seals Dickie's will in an envelope and scrawls across it that it is not to be opened until June. Afterwards, Tom sinks Dickie's Hermes Baby typewriter in the canal.

By the end of March, the papers are speculating that Dickie might be dead. Tom Ripley has been accepted by the winter colony in Venice, as a close friend of the missing socialite. Marge decides to come to Venice for a visit, anyway. Dickie invites her to lunch, and to stay at the palazzo. He finds Marge as irritating as ever, but tries to feign interest. She is almost inhumanly optimistic, still believing Dickie will show up, and the whole thing will turn out to be a misunderstanding. Tom feels ashamed with Marge, for her to think he was guilty of a relationship with Dickie. Tom, feigning innocence, asks if Marge may have sent a letter that upset Dickie when he was in Palermo, causing Dickie to behave erratically.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

In person, Tom feels guilty with Marge, not because he has murdered her beloved, but that she might think he has committed the unpardonable sin of homosexuality. He is deeply ashamed in realizing that she must suspect he has had sex with Dickie. In reality, Tom is in love with Dickie, still, but the intimacy goes far deeper. In some ways, Tom has become Dickie Greenleaf, while robbing Dickie of his life. It is interesting to note that Tom never feels guilty over theft or murder throughout the novel, only over his own homosexual tendencies. Tom is well aware of Marge's long "filthy" letter to Dickie in Palermo, accusing him of an affair with Tom Ripley. Tom uses that knowledge to imply to Marge and the police that she may have caused Dickie's suicide.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Tom calls Mr. Greenleaf in Rome. As Tom expected, Greenleaf sounds pitifully hungry for any information about his missing son. Tom calls from the house of a friend, Peter Smith-Kingsley, where he is having cocktails with Marge and a pair of attractive brothers from Trieste, the Franchettis. Mr. Greenleaf is beginning to fear that Dickie is dead.

One of the Franchetti brothers jokingly suggests that Dickie has traded passports with a Neapolitan fisherman or a Roman cigarette vendor, to hide from the police. He suggests the impostor is a poor forger, and had to disappear quickly. Tom protests that many people who know Dickie, including Tom himself, saw Dickie in January. Anyway, the Naples and New York bank experts disagree on which signatures are forged. One of the three even says there were no forgeries. Marge insists that Dickie's personality has changed so much in the past few months that his signature must have changed, as well. The Franchettis go out for the newspapers, which reveal that Dickie's house in Mongibello has sold, for twice the original price.

One of the Americans invites Marge to a cocktail party the following day, and she accepts. Tom is disappointed to learn that she will be staying over another night. Marge is in a giddy mood that irritates Tom, but he makes an effort to be charming to her. He even accedes to her request for a private gondola ride back to his palazzo, where they realize they have forgotten the key and must take the long way around, through the alley, to the back door.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

In his own identity as Tom Ripley, Tom is forming social alliances with the winter colony in Venice. They are eager to discuss the disappearance of his friend. He continues to be charming to Marge and Mr. Greenleaf, to mislead them. A more moral person might be hampered by guilt, but Tom has no such inhibitions.

Tom's attraction to the Franchetti brothers is obvious. Throughout the novel, only men are described as attractive. Marge physically disgusts Tom, as do other women. This reflects Tom's latent homosexuality, which he is unable or unwilling to admit.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

The next morning, Tom is awakened early by a messenger with a telegram from Mr. Greenleaf, saying he has decided to come to Rome after all, and will arrive about noon. When he arrives, Mr. Greenleaf is solemn and pale, but treats Tom with a hearty goodwill. Greenleaf insists on checking into a hotel instead of staying with Tom, but accepts an invitation to lunch. Tom is his old self-effacing self around the older man. Marge and Mr. Greenleaf are very friendly, although Marge insists she did not know him until he came to Rome. Tom can see that Marge still harbors hopes of becoming Mr. Greenleaf's daughter-in-law.

The Italian police have not found anything more out. According to Greenleaf, they are as useless as old women are. Mr. Greenleaf has hired an American private detective to straighten matters out. At first, Tom is slightly concerned, but he asks if the detective speaks Italian. Mr. Greenleaf has not thought to ask. Tom suggests that Dickie may be hiding in a tiny guesthouse in the south of Italy, slipping the proprietor some extra lire not to inform the police, but Greenleaf fears for his son's stability. Tom helpfully adds that Dickie did say if just one more thing happened to him in Palma, he did not know what he'd do.

Tom volunteers to Greenleaf the information about the sunken boat in San Remo, and "Dickie" helping a drunken or dead man into a car the day of Freddie Miles's murder. Tom protests that the police even believed Dickie murdered Tom, at one point. Greenleaf is surprised at the preponderance of evidence against his son. The two agree that Dickie is likely just hiding until things blow over.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Tom seems entirely insensible of the grief and anguish he has caused his benefactor, Mr. Greenleaf. These feelings will surely intensify once Dickie's death is known, and yet Tom seems really to have forgotten that he murdered the man. In his Tom Ripley identity, he feels no guilt for the murder of Freddie Miles, because "Dickie Greenleaf" killed him.

With Marge and Mr. Greenleaf, Tom has transformed himself into a Tom Ripley, who is more self-effacing and bumbling than ever, although he spends a bit more money than the old Tom. Rather than being Dickie's erstwhile male paramour, Tom plays the role of trusted friend.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

Tom hopes Marge will forget the cocktail party the following day, but she is determined to go. Tom hates making a spectacle of themselves, like two acrobats at a circus. Marge guzzles free martinis at the party, and Tom pretends he hardly knows her. The party is given by a second-rate dealer in antiques and bric-a-brac, and Tom reminds himself that being polite to such unsavory little men is part of being a gentleman. He entertains himself with thoughts of sailing to Greece in June.

Everyone at the party is eager to discuss Dickie's disappearance. The papers make no mention of a private detective from America, so Tom thinks that perhaps Mr. Greenleaf was not telling the truth. It was just one of those imaginary fears like believing Marge and Dickie were actually having an affair back in Mongibello, or the forgery scare. Now seven of the ten American forgery experts have decided that every signature presented at the bank is genuine. Tom reminds himself not to let his imaginary fears get the better of him. Finally, Tom convinces Marge to leave the party. She does not understand why he is uncomfortable. Tom cannot explain to Marge that he despises people of that class, when she is of that class herself.

They meet Mr. Greenleaf for dinner. Mr. Greenleaf and Marge make plans to return to Rome tomorrow. Tom collects his letters, including one from Bob Delancey. Bob says the police have been around questioning all the boarding house residents about a tax fraud scheme by someone named George McAlpin. Finally, the police have concluded that someone from off the street picked up McAlpin's letters, he never lived in the rooming house at all. Tom is relieved to have the tax fraud charge off his mind at last. He hates his old friends from New York more than ever. What dismal lives they lead, creeping in and out of subways, going to jobs. The worst little trattoria in Venice is better than the best restaurant in New York, Tom thinks.

Tom loves his possessions. They represent a select few, quality items that provide one with self-respect. They remind him that he exists, and gave joy to his life. It would have taken Tom many years to accumulate the fine things he has now. Dickie's money, he thinks, only gave momentum to the path he was already on. Tom is just falling into a comfortable sleep on the sofa when Marge bursts in. She has found Dickie's rings, while looking through Tom's things for a needle and thread.

Tom tells her that Dickie gave him the rings in Rome, in February, before he went to Palma. Tom had completely forgotten about them, because Dickie asked him not to mention them. Dickie told him he wanted Tom to have the rings, if anything ever happened to Dickie. It is one of the reasons Tom believes Dickie may have committed suicide. While Tom is telling Marge this story, he is thinking how he will kill her if she does not believe him. He will beat her senseless with the heel of his shoe, and push her



into the canal. He will tell the police it was an accident, she slipped on the mossy palazzo steps and hit her head.

Marge looks dazed, like a woman newly widowed. She believes Tom entirely, and starts to cry. Marge says this makes it rather pointless for Greenleaf to bring in a private detective. She goes back to bed, and Tom sinks back on the couch. He is as exhausted as he was after Dickie's murder and the murder of Freddie Miles. He was so close to killing her. Tom even imagined the exact words he would say to Mr. Greenleaf about the accident. He imagined them so intensely that he began to believe them himself. Sometimes Tom absolutely forgets that he has committed murder.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Tom has assumed an upper-class identity so thoroughly that he is offended by the posh cocktail party they are invited to. He disdains people of Marge's class, although they are far above his own previous station in life, and much more genteel than his New York friends. Tom has used his notoriety as a friend of the missing man to be admitted into the highest social circles, but he resents it when Marge does the same thing. Tom's thought that they are revealing themselves as if they were circus acrobats is particularly revealing. Highsmith uses the reference to the gay acrobats on the beach at Cannes to illustrate what it is that Tom hates most about homosexuality. He believes homosexuals to be inferior people of lower rank, and so disdains them.

Tom receives an unexpected bonus in learning that the police do not suspect him of the George McAlpin tax fraud. One of the secrets to Tom's amoral behavior is revealed in this chapter. Tom convinces himself of his lies. He believes them so completely, he is telling the truth when he talks about them. When Marge discovers Dickie's rings, Tom is completely willing to kill her if she makes the connection with Tom assuming Dickie's identity. Instead, Marge accepts the rings as further evidence that Dickie Greenleaf meant to kill himself.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

Marge calls Mr. Greenleaf at 8:30 the next morning and tells him about Dickie's rings. Tom is frightened that the astute Mr. Greenleaf is just the person to figure out the plot, and bring a policeman around to arrest Tom. Instead, Greenleaf accepts this new evidence that Dickie intended to kill himself. Marge is wearing the traveling suit that she arrived in. To Tom's relief, she apparently still intends to go to Rome that day.

A few minutes later, Mr. Greenleaf calls to say the American private detective, Alvin McCarron, has arrived by plane. Greenleaf asks Marge and Tom both to come to his hotel, to fill the detective in on what they know. Tom realizes that the detective is here to see him. Otherwise, the man would have met Marge and Greenleaf in Rome. Everything depends on the impression he makes on this detective, Tom decides. Tom repeats the story of the rings to McCarron, stammering a little. McCarron verifies that the last time anyone saw Dickie was on February 15, when he got off the boat from Palma. Marge admits she hasn't seen Dickie since November 23rd. When she adds that she just missed seeing Dickie in Rome in early December, Tom is so relieved he could kiss her.

The detective seems to think Dickie has killed himself, possibly after murdering Freddie Miles. Tom tries to assure the detective that Dickie would never murder anyone. Tom does succeed in making the detective believe Dickie was despondent over his lack of talent at painting, and passionately wanted to be a great painter. He describes Dickie losing his temper violently once or twice, which further reinforces McCarron's suspicions. Tom is worried what the detective will discover in Rome, until he realizes that the man speaks no Italian. He will never be able to question Rovassini or the Buffis effectively in English.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Tom displays his amoral nature further in his deceptions towards Mr. Greenleaf and the detective. Despite the obvious grief of Greenleaf and Marge, Tom glibly paints a portrait of Dickie as a despondent failed painter with a vile temper. Tom leads McCarron to the conclusion that Dickie has killed Freddie Miles, and then himself, perhaps in a love triangle over Marge.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

McCarron calls Tom the next day from Rome, wanting the names of everyone Dickie knew in Mongibello. Tom gives him the names of a score of acquaintances, enough to keep the man busy for days. Tom only omits Signor Pucci, not wanting McCarron to realize that it was Tom who arranged for the disposal of Dickie's goods. Tom also claims to have seen the painter Di Massimo, once in Rome, and gives McCarron a description of a generic middle-aged Italian man.

Tom waits quietly at home in Venice for several days, just as one would do as the search for a missing friend continues. He even declines several invitations. For five days, there are no calls or letters, even from Tenente Rovassini. On the sixth day, Mr. Greenleaf calls to say he will be returning to the U.S. at the end of the week. His attitude is that Dickie has probably killed himself. If not, Greenleaf thinks, let the devil take him for abandoning his family and hiding.

Peter Smith-Kingsley mentions to Tom that he will be returning to his home in Ireland at the end of May. He invites Tom to join him. Tom briefly considers repeating his relationship with Dickie, but realizes he does not look enough like Peter, although he can impersonate him very effectively over the phone. Suddenly, Tom is near tears, thinking of their first trip to Rome and Dickie's bright smile. He is sorry to have lost such a good friend. He feels they could have lived a good life, been together forever, if only Dickie had not turned on him that day, when Tom tried on his clothes.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

Tom does not feel any remorse for killing his friend. He even considers using the same ruse with Peter Smith-Kingsley, and only rejects the plan, because there is insufficient physical resemblance. Tom feels sorry for himself rather than Dickie or Dickie's family. Tom feels that he has lost someone he is close too. Guilt is simply not in Tom's emotional vocabulary. Tom's feelings for Dickie are intertwined with his hidden homosexual desire for the man. Highsmith seems to argue that by making homosexuality a dark, forbidden urge, men are driven to greater crimes.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

In early June, Tom writes Mr. Greenleaf a letter. Tom tells Greenleaf that he has discovered an envelope from Dickie that was forgotten in a suitcase. Opening it up, Tom was surprised to find Dickie's will, leaving everything to his friend, Tom Ripley. Tom asks Mr. Greenleaf's advice on the will's authenticity, and how he should proceed. Tom says he is leaving Venice and gives his next address as the American Express office in Athens. Tom realizes what he is doing is dangerous, but just cannot stop himself. If an investigation is launched into the signatures, he may finally be arrested. However, Tom is down to his last two thousand dollars, transferred before Dickie's "disappearance" in February, and he does not have many options. He just cannot stand the idea of traveling to Greece as shy, meek, penniless little Tom Ripley.

Two days before he sails, the countess informs Tom that Dickie's suitcases have been found, under a false name, at the American Express office in Venice. Tom is sure he will be caught now, especially when he learns that the police are checking the fingerprints on the luggage in Venice. If they compare the prints to Dickie's fingerprints from the U.S. or Mongibello, Tom's deception will certainly be uncovered. He could get the death penalty.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

Ultimately, it is Tom's desire to leave the Tom Ripley identity far behind, that prompts him to risk everything by making the will public. Tom thinks that if he is arrested, the seven months of freedom and luxury have compensated him for his miserable life as a child. With only about two thousand dollars left, Tom feels he has no options except to probate Dickie's estate. The idea of actually seeking a job that would use his skills in accounting and Italian never enters Tom's mind. Tom would gladly die rather than assume a plebian existence again.





# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

The worst sign that the authorities are about to apprehend Tom is that Rovassini, the police officer from Rome, didn't even call to inform Tom of the new developments in his friend's disappearance. Everyone realizes Tom is upset, desperate and despondent, but they think he is distraught at the idea that his friend Dickie Greenleaf could have been murdered. The fact that all of Dickie's things, even his toothbrush and shaving kit, had been found in Venice under the name of Robert S. Fanshaw implies Dickie is not living under another identity. The will is the worst evidence of all. If the police find the fingerprints on Dickie's luggage belong to someone else, they will scrutinize the will and determine it is a forgery, as well. The authorities will quickly surmise that Tom has murdered both Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles.

By the time he boards the *Hellenes* for Greece, Tom is a mass of twitching nerves. Nevertheless, he plays the part of the gentleman. He befriends a crippled elderly woman, Mrs. Cartwright, and listens to endless stories of her girlhood. All the while, Tom is expecting the ship's officers, alerted by radio from Italy, to arrest him at any moment. Perhaps they are waiting until they land in Greece. After all, it is not as though he can escape. Tom's only regret is that there is so much of the world he still has not seen - Australia, India, Japan and South America.

When the ship lands, there are four uniformed police officers on dock. The passengers calmly disembark, but the police make no move towards Tom. He wonders why they are waiting. Unable to control his curiosity any longer, Tom walks over to the news vendor and buys several papers. Tom is determined to remain cool and smiles at a policeman, who politely nods back. According to the papers, no one named Robert S. Fanshaw has been found. Tom is astounded and elated to read that the fingerprints on the luggage match those of Dickie Greenleaf, taken from his abandoned apartment in Rome. The papers speculate that Dickie Greenleaf has committed suicide, or is hiding after murdering Freddie Miles.

Tom feels shaky and lightheaded. He is not suspected at all. In Athens, he receives another pleasant shock, a letter from Mr. Greenleaf. The Greenleafs profess to be unsurprised that Dickie has left his trust fund and all his property to Tom. They say they are aware of how fond Dickie was of Tom, and will respect his last wishes. Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf are resigned, to the fact that Dickie has killed himself. Greenleaf has his lawyers converting Dickie's estate to Tom's name.

Tom is astounded. He will never be punished for the two murders, now. The police believe Dickie Greenleaf is responsible for both of them. Tom has realized his wildest dreams when he left New York - he has become exactly the type of young man of private income he dreamt of.



## Chapter 30 Analysis

Tom is elated. His amoral personality has served him well. By not showing any signs of guilt or remorse, Tom has succeeded in convincing the police he is the bereaved friend of a violent criminal, Dickie Greenleaf. He has ingratiated himself with Marge and the Greenleafs, who now see him as a loyal friend of Dickie's.

Tom's change in identity is complete. He now moves in the elite social circles he once dreamt of. He is precisely the type of young man with a private income that he so envied in his former life. Although he is forced to travel on the Tom Ripley passport, Tom has succeeded in completely transforming himself.



# Characters

## Tom Ripley

Tom Ripley was orphaned at a very young age when his parents were drowned on a boat in Boston Harbor, inspiring a life-long fear of water. Tom was raised by his Aunt Dottie, a woman of comfortable means who begrudged every cent she spent on her nephew. She belittles the boy, constantly telling him he is a "sissy," just like his father. In this cold environment, Tom matures into a young man who is incapable of feeling empathy or sympathy for any other human being. He has no understanding of right and wrong, but clearly understands the necessity of not being caught.

Miserable with his aunt, Tom ran away when he was seventeen, and was returned home. At some point, he was shipped to Denver to live with his Aunt Bea in her boarding house. There, Tom met a young man who attended the University of Colorado, which Tom usually claims as his alma mater. At twenty, Tom ran away again, to New York, to become an actor. He was amazed at the difficulties actors have to overcome. With no training and little talent, Tom abandoned acting after being rebuffed three times. Since that time, he has been a stock clerk in an IRS office, an accountant in a department store, and a crewmember on a banana boat bound for New Orleans. When Tom meets Mr. Greenleaf, his most recent scheme to make money utilizes his talent for mathematics in a tax fraud scheme.

## Dickie Greenleaf

Blonde, charming, confident and wealthy, Dickie Greenleaf is everything Tom Ripley would like to be. He is an accomplished sailor from a prestigious shipbuilding family, with a private income from a trust fund. Rather than use his talent for designing sailboats, Dickie has chosen to live in a tiny village in southern Italy, where he is an enthusiastic, if untalented, painter. Even when slightly inebriated, Dickie is fastidiously neat, and comfortable in all social settings. Dickie initially has no memory of meeting Tom Ripley in New York, and is cool to the newcomer, who he correctly sees as an upstart and social climber.

Tom can easily understand why Dickie is unwilling to return to the gray days and drab work world of New York. Dickie's daily routing in Mongibello is to paint in the morning, go to the beach for a swim, and then have a leisurely lunch and a siesta. In the late afternoons, he sails with Marge. In the evenings, they often go out to dinner, sometimes in nearby Naples. Their life seems idyllic to Tom, as well as Dickie. The two become friends only when Tom confesses that Mr. Greenleaf has paid his passage to Europe, in hopes that Tom can convince Dickie to return home. Tom still has most of the \$600 in expense money that Mr. Greenleaf gave to him, and suggests the two use the money for excursions around Europe.



## Marge Sherwood

Marge is Dickie Greenleaf's love interest in Mongibello. The two friends have been inseparable for more than a year, all but living together. Marge is the sturdy, blonde, athletic, "good egg" type. She has the eternal optimism and good humor of a Girl Scout, and is clearly madly in love with Dickie, whom she hopes to marry. It is Marge who initially insists that Dickie invite Tom Ripley home to lunch. When the two "boys" spend a drunken night together in Rome, Marge is cool. Then, she proceeds to accuse both Dickie and Tom of being "queer." Dickie is deeply offended, although he is just as clearly uninterested in Marge, sexually. Marge's accusation causes a deep schism between Dickie and Tom, which eventually results in Dickie's death.

## Mr. Herbert Greenleaf

When Tom first sees the graying man in a business suit following him, he thinks he looks like someone's father, not a policeman. Tom's perception proves to be absolutely correct. Mr. Greenleaf's only son is Richard "Dickie" Greenleaf, a passing acquaintance of Tom's. Mr. Greenleaf is eager to have his son return home from Italy and assume control of the family shipyard, especially since Mrs. Greenleaf is seriously ill. Mr. Greenleaf, with only slight steering by Tom, convinces Ripley to undertake an all-expenses paid trip to Italy, to convince Dickie to return to New York.

## Mrs. Emily Greenleaf

Tall, blonde, thin and patrician, Mrs. Greenleaf has a slightly formal air but essentially is a naive and trusting as her husband and son. Mrs. Greenleaf has leukemia, which is a major reason Mr. Greenleaf wants his son to return home to live, instead of staying in Italy.

## Freddie Miles

An extremely unattractive, overweight, red-haired friend of Dickie Greenleaf's, Freddie invites Dickie and his friends to a skiing weekend in Cortina on December 2. When Tom/Dickie does not attend and does not send a letter to cancel, Freddie tracks him down in Rome through a young Italian man.

## Mark Priminger

Priminger is an ugly, middle-aged New Yorker whose hobby is adopting penniless young men as protygyes. Tom initially lives with Priminger in his townhouse, but when Priminger becomes too demanding, he moves in with his friend Bob Delancey.



## Tenente Rovassini

An officer in the Roman police force, the Tenente (or Lieutenant) heads the investigation into the murder of Freddie Miles, and the disappearance, first of Tom Ripley and then of Dickie Greenleaf. A middle-aged, graying, Italian man of average appearance, the Tenente is the only person to see Tom in both his identities, as Dickie Greenleaf in Rome and Tom Ripley in Venice. Tom is successful in his deception, however, and Rovassini never suspects the two are actually the same man.

## Signor Pucci

The assistant manager of the only decent hotel in the village of Mongibello, Tom arranges for Signor Pucci to sell Dickie's house, furniture and boat at bargain rates after his death.

## The Buffis

Tom/Dickie's landlords in Rome, Signora Buffi precipitates a crisis when she insists to Freddie Miles's questions that Signor Greenleaf lives alone, and that he is at home, immediately after Tom speaks to Freddie in his Tom Ripley persona.

## Alvin McCarron

McCarron is the stocky, middle-aged American detective Herbert Greenleaf calls in when the Italian police are unable to find his son is of average intelligence. His inquiries are further limited by his inability to question witnesses in Italian.

## Di Massimo

It is fitting that a novel about lying and deception should have at least three imaginary characters. Tom invents a heavy-set, gray-haired, middle-aged, penniless Roman painter as an excuse for Dickie to move to Rome. After Tom/Dickie repeatedly describe the painting tutor to Marge, Mr. Greenleaf, acquaintances, and the police, no one doubts the man exists.

## George McAlpin

Tom's flirtations with alternate identities predate his friendship with Dickie Greenleaf. In New York, Tom has created an alter ego in George McAlpin, a fictitious middle-aged IRS clerk who fraudulently demands payments from unsuspecting taxpayers.



## Robert S. Fanshaw

When Dickie Greenleaf is suspected of the murder's of both Tom Ripley and Freddie Miles, his identity becomes too much of a liability and must be abandoned. Tom is unable to dispose of Dickie's belongings, most of which have Dickie's initials on them. He hits upon the plan of putting Dickie's suitcases and paintings in storage at the Venice American Express office, under the name Robert S. Fanshaw, another imaginary character.



# Objects/Places

## New York

Ripley's New York is the area around Second and Third Avenue, filled with second-class antique stores and seedy bars. He abhors the concept of returning to the world of subway rides and a 9-to-5 job. Tom occasionally frequents a nice restaurant or one of the better clubs, such as the one in which he encounters Mr. Greenleaf.

## Mongibello

Dickie Greenleaf, the scion of a wealthy shipbuilding family, has taken up permanent residence as a painter in the tiny village of Mongibello, in southern Italy. Mongibello has only one decent hotel, a few cafes, and an extremely limited social life. Few Americans spend the winter there, although tourists are common in the summer.

## Paris

Tom has no time to see the sights in Paris on his initial trip to Mongibello. He catches only a glimpse of the awnings and cafes, as he breezes through the train station. His desire to return to the City of Lights alone with Dickie creates much friction with Marge. Eventually, after Dickie's death, Tom poses as Dickie and spends Christmas in Paris.

## Rome

After Dickie Greenleaf's murder, Tom assumes his identity and rents an expensive apartment in Rome. He does not intend to remain in Rome over the winter, but wants to have a home base, something that the orphan Tom Ripley never had before.

## Venice

Tom has avoided Venice, because he believes it will inevitably be disappointing. To his surprise, Tom finds transportation by motor launch around the city as speedy and efficient as by train in other cities. He loves the canals, and the fact that one can walk anywhere. The lack of cars, Tom feels, gives the city a human scale. When he is forced to reassume the hated identity of Tom Ripley, he rents a palazzo in Venice.

## Greece

During their tightest, happiest time together, Tom and Dickie plan to spend the winter in Greece alone, without Marge. The climax of the novel occurs on a boat to Greece, when



Tom feels he will inevitably be discovered as a double murderer, a forger and an imposter.

## Dickie Greenleaf's Rings

Dickie Greenleaf constantly wears two rings. The one on his right hand has a large green stone, and symbolizes wealth. Dickie removes it only when he showers or swims. The signet ring on the smallest finger of his left hand symbolizes family and social status. Dickie never removes that ring. Together, the two rings represent everything Tom most envies about Dickie. Tom's initial impulse to kill Dickie occurs immediately after he thinks of stealing the green ring when he leaves. Symbolically, by killing Dickie and assuming his identity, Tom has stolen everything those two rings mean. When Marge discovers the two rings in Tom's luggage, she realizes that Dickie is probably dead, although she believes he killed himself. It is simply impossible to imagine Dickie Greenleaf without his rings.

## The Hermes Baby Typewriter

The Hermes Baby was a tiny, chic instrument manufactured in Switzerland and much loved by international travelers. Barely bigger than a box of kitchen matches, it produced typewritten letters and documents. Traveling with a Hermes Baby in the 1950s was the technological equivalent of traveling with an I-pod and a portable DVD player today. Even when Tom discards most of Dickie's possessions, he retains the typewriter, which allows him to forge Dickie's will.

## Dickie's Clothes

Dickie and Tom have their first disagreement when Marge accuses them of being gay, and Dickie returns to his house to find Tom dressed in his clothes. Symbolically, the clothes represent Dickie's identity, his very soul, which Tom is trying on long before he ever conceives of a way to gain access to Dickie's life and wealth.

## Dickie Greenleaf's Will

When Tom is forced to abandon the Dickie Greenleaf identity and no longer has access to Dickie's bank accounts, he develops a brilliant plan to legally claim Dickie's wealth. Tom types a will on Dickie's typewriter and forges his signature, bequeathing all his possessions and trust fund income to Tom. Bereaved, the Greenleafs accede to Dickie's last request without a battle.





## The Motorboat

When Tom first decides to kill Dickie Greenleaf and assume his identity, he needs a plan to eliminate the body. Although Tom is deathly afraid of water, he thinks that losing the body at sea is the simplest way to make it disappear. Therefore, Tom suggests the two rent a small motorboat in San Remo. Dickie, who comes from a family of shipbuilders and is completely at home on the sea, agrees. After he murders Dickie with an oar, there is so much blood in the bottom of the boat that Tom realizes he can never return it. He sinks the boat in a secluded cove, where it is discovered at precisely the worst time.



# Social Sensitivity

the "Preface" to his book, Patricia Highsmith, Russell Harrison curiously qualifies the genre of Highsmith's work.

Harrison writes, "For a long time, her work was, in the United States, viewed as crime or suspense fiction," but he is careful to explain that while her work is not representative of "literary realism," it does evince and "create in readers" "states of extreme psychological tension unlike anything produced by her contemporaries." Harrison's reading of Highsmith's works as psychological and social, reflecting the ways in which the "self" is created, informed, and altered by society, illustrates that her novels are, in a sense, subversive—challenging the norms of the societies that she unveils.

While her works cannot be reduced to the categories "crime" or "suspense" fiction, her treatment of the characters' quest for identification within (or rejection of) an often hostile environment leaves the reader with a whirlwind of questions regarding the construction of the "self" and its social role.

Highsmith's fourth published novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, focuses on the question of "identification"—a question not so easily resolved for the resilient Tom Ripley.

Tom Ripley is talented, yes, but he is alienated from a larger society and himself. Tom's talent is fraud (not "a fraud"), for he does possess the talent of imitation. But before Tom begins to see himself as another, reconstructing "Tom Ripley," we are introduced to "Tom" and recognize that his character is, at best, a construct, for he is too eager to escape his world to become someone else. The novel begins with Tom's fear of being discovered, being "found out," a fear that manifests itself in a disastrous and climactic scene once Tom can no longer hide behind his well constructed facade.

Though Tom evolves into a criminal (in the largest sense, for he becomes a murderer), he is originally conceived, and represented as, a voyeur. Watching and waiting, Tom hides in a bar, caught between the social sphere that he inhabits and a mental prison that leads him to question that he is about to be "found out" for fraud. But it is at this moment of fear of "discovery" that Tom discovers an escape—from his world, its inhabitants, and himself.

Ironically, Tom's introduction into this new world is one marked by his identification as "Tom Ripley," an identity that he will later erase in the context of his journey to Italy, to Dickie Greenleaf, and away from a unified notion of self. "Pardon me, are you Tom Ripley?" Herbert Greenleaf implores on the second page of the novel. It is at this moment that Tom breathes a sigh of relief; "Free!" he thinks to himself. Herbert Greenleaf offers Tom the opportunity to leave his world, at Herbert Greenleaf's expense. While the two men sit across from each other at the bar, in conversation, the dissimilarity is striking. Herbert Greenleaf is a shipbuilding magnate; Tom Ripley is



wanted for fraud. But both characters despair over their respective lots—Herbert Greenleaf wants his son, Dickie Greenleaf, to return from Mongibello and enter the "family business," while Tom wants to escape like Dickie—to live a life of leisure. But Herbert Greenleaf has heard (mistakenly) that Dickie and Tom are friends (the two are little more than acquaintances). He thinks that "Tom Ripley" is the one to encourage and facilitate his son's return. And yet, during this meeting and the next to follow at the Greenleafs' home, Tom is readily constructing stories about his friendship with Dickie, to merely "pass the time."

Amused by the Greenleafs' plight, their desire to see their son's safe return, and driven by his own needs, Tom Ripley willingly accepts the offer of a lifetime—a trip to Europe.

Tom's migration to Europe signifies a rebirth for his character. "He was starting a new life. Good-bye to all the second-hand people he had hung around and had let hang around him in the past three years in New York. . . . A clean slate," the narrator tells us as Tom begins to "play a role on the ship." From this point on, Tom continually renegotiates his identity, trying on different "hats" as readily as he dons a cap that transforms him into a "country gentleman, a thug, an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a plain American eccentric, depending on how he wore it." A "plain American," indeed, for Tom, upon arriving in Italy, attempts to become this "other" American, an expatriate, a young American of leisure, freedom, and volition to become someone else. It is at this moment that Dickie's life appears before him, literally. Tom's desire then is directed toward Dickie—all that Dickie possesses and is.

Tom introduces himself to Dickie as "Tom Ripley," but Dickie's question, "Tom what is it?" illustrates Tom's non-existence in Italy at this point. Tom does not know the area, or the people, and can only tell Dickie that he does not know how long he will stay, for he has to "look the place over."

Dickie reaffirms Tom's spectral presence in Italy as he validates Tom's suspicion that "You don't seem to remember me from New York." As Tom gradually moves into Dickie's life and, eventually, home, he appears elusive, indefinable. When asked about his "job," Tom confesses that he can do a "number of things . . . forge a signature, fly a helicopter, handle dice, impersonate practically anybody." While Dickie is impressed by Tom's stories and imitations, Tom's desire for Dickie becomes problematic, for Tom is so elusive. The reader knows Tom not by his own descriptions but by his desire to become "liked" by Dickie—for that was something that Tom wanted "more than anything else in the world"—and then "like" Dickie. Early in Tom and Dickie's "friendship" (for it is hard to term it without qualification, as Dickie tires of Tom and Tom desires Dickie rather compulsively), Tom begins to see himself like Dickie. Admiring Dickie's rings, Tom recognizes that "Dickie had long, bony hands, a little like my own hands." And it is this process of "mirroring" that inevitably drives Dickie The Talented Mr. Ripley away from Tom, for the imitation is too good, and too disconcerting for Dickie's tastes.

Tom's desire for Dickie is intriguing in its dimensions, for, as much as Tom wants Dickie to like him, he wants to be like Dickie, and, as some instances in the text support, be with Dickie. When Marge, a fellow expatriate living in Mongibello alongside (somewhat



"with") Dickie, disrupts and interrupts Tom's plans with Dickie— for Cortina in the winter and in the more present time of Mongibello—Tom begins to resent her presence. Dickie attempts to reconcile his "friendship" with Marge. But Dickie embraces her, while Tom, again the voyeur, witnesses. Enraged, and feeling lost, alienated, Tom can only despair over the turn of events and wonder, "And Dickie— !" Violent and out of control, Tom enters Dickie's room to disrupt the situation, and then, more chillingly, calms and begins to dress as Dickie. "Marge, you must understand that I don't love you," Tom states before the mirror, "in Dickie's voice, with Dickie's higher pitch on the emphasized words, with the little growl in his throat at the end of the phrase that could be pleasant or unpleasant, intimate or cool, according to Dickie's mood." Examining his reflection in the mirror, Tom begins to realize how much he could look like Dickie when a voice interrupts the narrative—"What're you doing?" Dickie enters the room. He is upset with Tom, and states, "I wish you'd get out of my clothes . . . Shoes, too? Are you crazy?"

This moment is significant in the destruction of the friendship, and the fragmentation of Tom. At this moment, Dickie informs Tom, "I'm not queer. I don't know if you have the idea that I am or not." Tom claims that he had not thought so, and attempts to dissuade Dickie from believing that he is. Though the text never explicitly defines Tom's sexual preferences or history, Dickie seems somewhat unconvinced.

As Tom begins to speculate on their (Tom and Dickie's) New York crowd, Tom distinguishes that some of that crowd is homosexual, further blurring the lines of sexuality and friendship between himself and Dickie. But, at this point, Dickie too appears elusive, leading the reader to wonder if they are both homosexual characters.

But we never resolve this issue, for, as Tom states, "I feel as if I've . . . ," Dickie fails to listen. Tom is left desiring Dickie's company and Dickie's desires are left indecipherable.

In their "final" trip together—final in the sense that Dickie tires of Tom and Tom will not stand for Dickie's rejection—a curious scene evolves that again complicates the dynamics of their relationship. In San Remo, Tom and Dickie go to the beach and discover a group of acrobats, in which Tom expresses an interest. Again, Dickie questions Tom's sexuality, and this scene stages the denouement of the relationship. Dickie's taunts leave Tom feeling ashamed and abandoned, for he realizes that "Dickie was just shoving him out in the cold." Tom's desperation, and yet cool and calculated response to the realization, is evinced in his thought: "He could . . . he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself. He could do everything that Dickie did." While Tom will no longer to live with Dickie, he can, in fact, subsume Dickie's identity—become Dickie himself. From this point, Tom deliberates no more, and plans to kill Dickie.

Once resolved to kill Dickie, Tom has no bouts of conscience. Ethics and morality are as far from Tom's mind as America. Tom's fear is not of becoming a "murderer," or guilt of committing the act, but rather a fear of the "deep water." Psychoanalytically speaking, he is afraid of himself—not Dickie—the depth of his own psyche and the impenetrability of his "self." Tom fails to know himself, and is afraid of that fact, but the amorality that is expressed in his cold and cruel thoughts illustrate the utter absence of self that is "Tom



Ripley," and this absence is what constitutes the majority of the novel, as the narrator states, "And the story there."

The "story there" is intriguing in its propositions, for Tom as "Dickie Greenleaf" must convince the European society that he is an American of wealth and privilege, yet Tom's desire to become Dickie is not merely a longing to become a wealthy American, but a new "type." Tom wanders through Europe—Rome and then Paris—positing his new identity, and his function as an American "expatriate." For Tom, his newly defined role is not one of boundaries, but flexible borders; he is able to become a part of each world that he enters: "This was the clean slate he had thought about on the boat coming over from America. This was the real annihilation of his past and of himself, Tom Ripley, who was made up of that past, and his rebirth as a completely new person." When Tom, as "Dickie," is invited to the home of a Frenchwoman, he wonders, "How many Americans alone in Paris could get themselves invited to a French home only a week or so in the city?" Indoctrinated (though in a limited sense) into these communities, Tom feels part of them, yet alienated from others, because "It wouldn't do to become too friendly with any of these . . . One of them might know somebody who knew Dickie very well, someone who might be at the next party." This new identity, though more flexible than that of "Tom Ripley," is still constrained and again leads to devastation.

Since Tom "had two people to take care of," he has to maintain this delicate construction of self. Avoiding the unveiling and unraveling of his plot, Tom must murder an "innocent" Freddie Miles, who suspects that Tom's facade is anything but real.

Marge, too, becomes suspicious of Tom, and Dickie's disappearance. All the while, Tom continues to imitate Dickie, to "act those things with every gesture," and rids Dickie's traces from his new possessions.

But Dickie cannot be erased from the text, for Tom inscribes his own body with markers of Dickie's absent presence—his rings, his clothes, his initials on luggage. Such markers indicate the inevitability that Dickie cannot be erased from the text, and that Tom can never fully "be" Dickie Greenleaf.

Tom prepares for the inevitability when he must become "Tom Ripley" again: It was a good idea to practise jumping into his own character again, because the time might come when he would need to in a matter of seconds, and it was strangely easy to forget the exact timbre of Tom Ripley's voice. He conversed with Marge until the sound of his own voice in his ears was exactly the same as he remembered it . . . But mostly he was Dickie, discoursing in a low tone with Freddie and Marge, and by long distance with Dickie's mother. The conflation of Tom and Dickie occurs when the detective in Rome wonders about Dickie's involvement with Freddie, for "witnesses" spied Freddie with Dickie on the night of his death. Ironically, Tom can only save himself by "re-becoming" Tom, for Dickie is now suspect. As Dickie, Tom is no longer safe, and it is to "himself" that he returns.

But "Tom" has no self—and this new construction and affirmation of "Tom Ripley" is no more telling than the former. He lies to construct this other "Dickie Greenleaf" who may



have murdered Freddie, while framing himself as an "innocent abroad." Wandering the countryside alone, he tells the detective he was—and a wanderer he remains. But Tom will not return to the poverty of his former life, for he has one last trick up his sleeve. Tom, forging Dickie's signature, had made certain that he was Dickie's benefactor, and so signs the estate that will grant Tom the freedom and prosperity he desires, at Dickie's expense (in all senses of the word).

And yet while Tom constructs himself anew, he is not altogether different from the Tom Ripley we met at the beginning of the novel. Worrying that he will be "found out," Tom boards a ship to Greece, on the "lookout" for policemen who would come to arrest him. Herbert Greenleaf again intervenes, in a letter, though, for his role in the novel is as tentative as it first was—he is Tom's benefactor. Mr. Greenleaf's response that he will not contest the will seals Tom's fate—again. Tom is able to travel on, with Dickie's money in hand. Ironically, though Tom is recreated, he is the same; although Tom can no longer live as Dickie, for Dickie is now the suspected murderer who killed himself in grief, he will live like Dickie.

Ending as it began, "And the story there" continues, ripe for the next Ripley saga.



## Techniques

As a contemporary work of fiction (written after 1945), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* focuses on the dissolution, or disparity, of the "self." The novel's focus on the solipsistic nature of its protagonist, a character who is equally antagonistic to himself, reflects the works appearing after World War II, infused with questions of "national," if not "individual," identity. Locating this novel in Europe heightens the drama of displacement; placing this novel in Italy creates the drama of what Anthony Minghella, screenplay writer and director of the 1999 film adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, refers to as the exploration of "issues of identity and sexuality." The novel is "escapist" in the sense that it allows Tom Ripley the opportunity to travel beyond his society to explore the boundaries of his identity. What ensues, most tellingly, reveals how tenuous those boundaries are.

While *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is identifiable as a work of "contemporary" fiction, its location in and between the modern and postmodern is more ambiguous. Although the narration is third person omniscient, like James' *The Ambassadors*, the allusions to James' text illustrate that something else is at work in the novel. Highsmith's play with the modernist tradition is evident as the reader travels to Europe with Tom Ripley, only to then delve into the nightmare of Tom's mind. In this sense, Highsmith's work appears "postmodern" as it posits the idea that the self is polyvalent, multivocal— informed by other voices. This concept that the self is fragmented, and multiple, is played out in the context of the novel as Tom can only see himself as Dickie; once Dickie is removed from the text, Tom can become like him, if not liked by him.

While Highsmith is regarded as a writer of "suspense" fiction, as her work, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, would indicate, her work appears to transcend such simple categorizations. Minghella ends his "Introduction" to the screenplay for his film with a quote from Highsmith's work: If a suspense writer is going to write about murderers and victims, about people in the vortex of this awful whirl of events, he must do more than describe brutality and gore. He should be interested in justice or the absence of it in the world, good and bad, and in human cowardice or courage— but not merely as forces to move his plot in one direction. In a word his invented people must seem real.

While Harrison's reading of Highsmith's work cautions its classification as "literary realism," Highsmith's description of "suspense fiction" indicates its inclusion in, or borrowing from, the tradition of "realist" fiction. Tom Ripley is so striking, so horrifying, so surprising, because he is like us, only more extreme. His journey is like our own, as Minghella writes, "At some time or another we've all been Tom Ripley, just as we've all known a Dickie Greenleaf, the man who has everything, whose attention makes us feel special and important . . ." It is suspenseful in the sense that, at the story's beginning, Tom fears that the police will come to arrest him. It is suspenseful in the sense that, at the story's end, Tom fears that the police will come to arrest him. The plot follows the conventions of "suspense" fiction, but its exploration of Tom's mind— the criminal mind, yes, but so like our minds—illustrates how it borrows from other traditions.

Intriguingly, this idea of "borrowing" from literary traditions is consistent with all that Tom is. Tom borrows pieces of others' identities; he assumes traits he admires and mirrors those individuals. Similarly, Highsmith "borrows" from different literary traditions, forming a story that is not solely one "type" or another, but both—like Tom himself, who is Dickie and Tom at once.





# Themes

## Themes

Isolationism, a political term of the post "World War" climate, constitutes Tom Ripley's world. Isolated from his society in New York, Tom Ripley can only be a "fraud," an outsider who glimpses a world he wants to inhabit, and people he wants to be. As an American, he glimpses the realization of the "American Dream"—financial success and happiness—derived from the erasure of an old identity and construction of a new one. But this desire becomes dangerous, for the world that he escapes to is one marked by alienation. The expatriates living in Europe—Dickie, Marge, and Freddie—are all isolated from each other, and lacking identities save for their "flat" characterizations.

Amongst these elusive characters, Tom Ripley's spectral presence is in no way astonishing. What is shocking about Tom Ripley is the way in which he mirrors those around him—in an extremely literal sense (for he does dress as Dickie, before the mirror) and figuratively. Each American character lacks something—Marge desires Dickie's commitment, Dickie desires the valorization of others, and Freddie desires attention. Like these characters, Tom desires to be part of a community, to receive affirmation that he is "somebody," but he lacks the class status of the other characters. Tom believes that "It was impossible ever to be lonely or bored . . . so long as he was Dickie Greenleaf," but, the narrator reminds us, that is what "he thought." For Tom, desire's hold is stronger and more dangerous than it is for the other characters, for he does not merely look for affirmation from others, but must attempt to create a "self" that is worthy of such attention. He constantly makes excuses for his "inferior" appearance, and his use (and abuse) of Herbert Greenleaf's money. He is not from "old money," and his history is vague, at best. We know of Aunt Dottie, who need not send more checks to Tom once Herbert Greenleaf "sponsors" his travels. After Tom kills Dickie, his "ecstatic moment" results from the thought of "all the pleasures that lay before him now with Dickie's money, other beds, tables, seas, ships, suitcases, shirts, years of freedom, years of pleasure."

Identity, then, becomes complicated for these characters, because they are constantly defining themselves in relation to others.

The relationships between characters are problematic as sexuality is as ambiguous as Tom's "true self." The lines between characters—Marge and Dickie, Dickie and Tom—are unclear, and often the characters' words reflect more in their implications than in their enunciations. Dickie is entirely consumed by the need to proclaim Tom "queer" and himself "straight," but, somewhere in the midst of his speech, loses interest. Dickie claims that Marge thinks Tom is queer, but she is never quoted as saying such. Tom reads Marge's behavior as indicative of her love for Dickie and jealousy of Tom, but she only intimates such feelings. The triangle established has no clear boundaries, and the participants all appear naive to each others' motives.



In his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," Jacques Lacan explains that the "mirror stage" indicates the time in a child's life when he/she first assumes an image, a time when a child is able to look at his/her mirrored reflection and recognize the image as reflective of his/herself. For Lacan, this first stage in identification introduces alienation, for the child then realizes that he/she is unlike its mother and father. Each of the characters in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, particularly Tom, appears trapped in this "mirror stage." None can decisively posit who he/she is, and what his/her role in the novel is. For Tom, this failure to identify himself results in a doubled sense of alienation—he knows neither himself nor his role in this society.

Feeling alienated, divorced from this "Italian" society of expatriates (themselves "alien"), he can only try to assume another image.

When Tom first embarks upon this journey, Herbert Greenleaf asks him a curious question. On his journey to Europe, Tom remembers that the book Herbert Greenleaf inquires of is Henry James' *The Ambassadors*. A novel about "types"—American and European and all that those roles signify—James' work introduces the curious ways of the characters through a third person narration. But, strikingly, when Tom inquires of the book on the ship, he alters its title: "Have you Henry James' *The Ambassador*?"

Tom is the ambassador, a type amongst other types. Like James' novel, Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* introduces its characters through such a narrator, a narrator that, at times, seems "free associative," offering indictments of the characters' behaviors. In its totality, Highsmith's novel reads as a tale of fragmented selves, of which the reader must piece together—to glimpse all that is the "American" self. Classed and gendered, the "self" of the novel is problematic in its disunity, its desire for "another" that may (but can never, as the novel illustrates) complete it.

## Amorality

At its core, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is an exploration of the personality of one man, Tom Ripley. Today psychologists would likely label Ripley a sociopath. He feels his own emotions quite acutely, but is completely incapable of feeling any empathy or sympathy for other human beings. In fact, other people are no more than cardboard cutouts moving through the landscape, to Ripley. On the deepest level, like most two-year-olds, Ripley simply does not believe other people are as real as he is. The most pronounced example of this occurs in Tom's final days in New York, when he believes this greatest of all cities will cease to exist the minute his ship pulls away from the harbor.

This lack of empathy results in Ripley having no moral compass. Any action that benefits Tom Ripley is good, and anything that hurts him is bad, regardless of the outcome for other people. Tom has no conscience, and so is not able to recognize right and wrong as other do. To Ripley, other people and events exist only for his convenience. He honestly does not believe he is being manipulative or sponging off others. He believes they were put on Earth to serve him. One example of this is Ripley's constant lies. He exaggerates his friendship with Dickie Greenleaf in the opening



chapter to cadge a few drinks off Mr. Greenleaf, which eventually results in an all-expenses-paid trip to Europe.

Ripley's amorality means he never suffers guilty feelings or pangs of regret for depriving his best friend of his life. Ripley never feels ashamed around Marge, that he has killed her beloved. He never thinks that he has hurt Herbert Greenleaf by destroying his only son. Tom's lack of emotional reaction is a tremendous advantage, because it means he can devote all his attention and emotional energy to escaping capture. When Tom does momentarily regret killing Freddie Miles, it is only because the death creates complications that eventually lead to him forsaking the Dickie Greenleaf identity permanently.

## Homosexuality

Overt homosexuality was a forbidden topic in mainstream literature at the time this novel was originally published. Highsmith manages to tread delicately just this side of that line. It is obvious from Tom's loving, detailed descriptions of men, and his lifestyle, that he is attracted to males. It is less obvious whether Tom himself is aware of this predilection. He may be aware, but consciously rejecting the concept, as when Dickie tells Tom, "I'm not queer," and Tom responds, "Neither am I." As a child, Tom's Aunt Dottie maliciously taunted him with accusations that he was a "sissy," just like his father. In today's context, it is hard to understand the aura of humiliation that demeaning remark carried.

When Dickie himself taunts Tom about admiring a group of obviously gay acrobats, rehearsing wearing only G-strings, Tom turns on him. Furious, Tom hatches a plot to kill Dickie and assume his identity. In some sense, Tom may be trying to murder the portion of himself who is attracted to men, and transform himself into a heterosexual. When Freddie Miles begins to suspect that Dickie and Tom are lovers, Tom kills him. It would have been easy enough to silence Miles, or laugh off his accusations that Tom is impersonating Dickie. Instead, Tom kills Miles and attributes his death to Freddie's "own filthy mind."

It is also apparent that Dickie is attracted to Tom, although he seems never to have acted on his impulses. Dickie is involved with Marge in Mongibello at the beginning of the story. Marge is madly in love with Dickie but it is obvious that for Dickie, the relationship is entirely platonic. He clearly states that he hasn't been to bed with her and does not intend too, although the two practically live together. Dickie's rejection of his own latent homosexuality eventually causes him to reject Tom, and results in his death.

Highsmith may be arguing in the novel that the repression of homosexual urges as "socially unacceptable" results in far greater damage to the ego than their acceptance. Tom Ripley, she argues, was created by a demeaning aunt and a society that refused to accept the most basic facts of his existence.



## Identity

Tom's hidden and unacceptable sexual attraction towards Dickie Greenleaf is complicated by his own self-loathing. In New York, Tom is a shy, quiet young man with a gift for numbers. Unable to hold a job he considers worthy of his talents, Tom sponges off friends and becomes the protygy of the wealthy Marc Priminger, until Priminger becomes too demanding. Tom develops a half-baked scheme to defraud taxpayers as George McAlpin, without any way to profit from the scheme.

Tom does not just long to be with Dickie or possess Dickie emotionally and physically. He wants to devour him, to shed his shy, stooped, unassuming, faintly disreputable, penniless self and become the assured, educated young man with a private income. Tom initially has the impulse to kill Dickie in a moment of fury, as he has before. The impulse turns into a plot, however, when Tom realizes that the two men are enough alike physically that he can use Dickie's passport, gaining access to Dickie's wealth and acceptance in the highest social circles. Being heir to all of Dickie's fine possessions, including his white silk shirts, cufflinks, rings, and even his worn alligator wallet, give Tom far more pleasure and emotional gratification than any human relationship ever has. Tom spends endless nights alone planning the trips he will take as Dickie Greenleaf, caring for and caressing Dickie's possessions. One of them, Dickie's Hermes Baby typewriter, enables Tom to create a holographic will bequeathing himself all of Dickie's income. Finally, Tom can have the type of life he fantasized about on the ship from New York to Europe.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told in the third person past tense from Tom Ripley's point of view. The focus on Tom is extremely close, showing his thoughts and calculations and even, at times, his unconscious motivations. Almost every time Tom tells a lie, the reader is aware of it through Tom's thoughts. This technique is extremely effective at exposing the reader to Tom's deceptions, and his cold calculations to avoid punishment, even after committing two murders.

Tom's thoughts even reveal emotions and motives of which he may not be consciously aware. Through Tom's perceptions of attractive men and drab or inconsequential women, the reader is made aware of Tom's sexual attraction towards men, his unspoken and unacknowledged latent homosexuality. This is shown as early as the second chapter, when Tom is attracted to an adolescent Dickie in family photos. In the fourth chapter, Tom wistfully remembers Dickie Greenleaf's smile, although Greenleaf seems to have no memory of ever meeting Tom.

The limitation of this point of view is that it becomes difficult to introduce the innermost thoughts and feelings of other characters. Highsmith avoids this hazard by allowing Dickie Greenleaf, Marge Sherwood, Freddie Miles and Mr. Herbert Greenleaf to reveal themselves in their conversation. Their words reveal much more of the character's emotions, hopes and plans than they realize. In addition, Highsmith adroitly uses epistles, letters, telegrams and even newspaper headlines, to reveal events from the perspective of other characters. This technique makes it possible for Highsmith to include much material that Tom has no knowledge of, or direct access to.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily in New York and Italy in 1955 or 1956. Highsmith makes effective use of evocative detail to create a realistic and complete picture of a Europe that was uncrowded by tourists, cheap for Americans and welcoming. Tom Ripley is a young man with no prospects in New York, when he is first approached by the wealthy Herbert Greenleaf. Most of the action takes place in Italy, where Tom travels to try to persuade young Dickie Greenleaf to return home permanently. Tom stays with Dickie in the village of Mongibello, just south of Naples. The two take side trips to Naples, and Rome, as well as a fateful trip to Cannes, France and San Remo, Italy. After Dickie's death, Tom returns to Mongibello via Naples briefly, before renting an apartment in Rome. Using the Roman apartment as a home base, Tom travels to Paris for Christmas and returns through Lyons and Arles. When he is questioned about the murder of Freddie Miles, Tom travels to Palermo in Sicily, at the southern tip of Italy. He returns via train through Naples and Florence to the small town of Trento, where he purchases a

car, which he drives to Venice. Falling in love with the beautiful canals of Venice, Tom rents a palazzo where he remains until June, when he takes a ship to Greece.

## Language and Meaning

Highsmith includes many Italian and French words, and prefers British spellings, such as cheque and favour. She moves effortlessly between languages and does not always provide a translation, or meaning from context. Occasionally, the native English reader is confronted with a phrase that is incomprehensible, just as they would be in Europe. This gives a continental air to the novel, set in Europe in the 1950s. In some cases, references which were obvious to 1950s readers, such as the fact that a Hermes Baby is a brand of very small, portable typewriter, escapes the modern reader.

Highsmith varies the language to correspond with the insights of Tom Ripley as a conniving, slightly disreputable young New Yorker, or with Tom Ripley assuming the identity of Dickie Greenleaf, wealthy cosmopolitan young painter and socialite. As Tom becomes more sophisticated and experienced, the language of the novel, including his thoughts, becomes richer and subtler. It becomes the language, phrasing and rhythms of an upper class New Yorker, rather than a young man who was an orphan raised by an aunt in Boston and Denver, and worked on a Banana boat in his youth.

Highsmith uses subtle language to convey Tom's attraction to men, a delicate subject at the time the novel was written. Painstaking descriptions of men are given, while the appearance of women is only hinted at, as if Tom barely notes their existence. Only men are described as attractive. Marge, by all accounts a pretty young woman, is described as having a "gourd-like" figure. All of the words Highsmith uses to denote homosexuality are pejoratives of the period. Gay men are sissys, queers, pansys, perverts, deviants and fairies, but never simply gay or homosexual. Through her language, Highsmith conveys the condemnation of the period, although she never directly comments on it.

## Structure

The Talented Mr. Ripley is told in a set of chronological scenes. The 30, short, numbered chapters give a heightened sense of immediacy and tension, ensuring that the pace of the novel never flags. Tom Ripley's thoughts at every juncture are detailed, giving the reader access to his amoral, devious and conniving personality. Highsmith's greatest triumph may be simply making the mind of the sociopath accessible to the general public. Remarkably, she did so at a time when even the mental health profession had not fully recognized the disorder.

Highsmith's choice to have the crucial murder occur less than halfway through the book is interesting. Rather than a traditional murder mystery or detective story, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* becomes the story of the desperate lengths to which one amoral man will go, to conceal his crimes.



Letters, headlines, telegrams and messages are central to the story. Highsmith uses these epistles effectively by inserting them skillfully within the text. Letters from Mr. Greenleaf and Marge, in particular, give access to the character's thoughts and feelings without breaking from Tom Ripley's point of view. In some instances, as in the letter from Marge in Chapter 23, Highsmith includes replies to letters without showing the original. Reading letters Tom has written in the Dickie persona give the reader direct access to the remarkable transformation he is able to make, after murdering his friend.



## Quotes

"Mrs. Greenleaf,' Tom said gently, 'I want you to know that I'll do everything I can to make Dickie come back.'" Chapter 3, pg. 20

"Considering what Aunt Dottie might have sent him, with her income, the cheques were an insult. Aunt Dottie insisted that his upbringing had cost her more than his father had left in insurance, and maybe it had, but did she have to keep rubbing it in his face? Did anybody human keep rubbing a thing like that in a child's face?" Chapter 3, pg. 37

"He'd let a few days go by, he thought. The first step, anyway, was to make Dickie like him. That he wanted more than anything else in the world." Chapter 8, pg. 53

"Dickie even said, 'Thank you, Mr. Greenleaf,' when Tom paid the carozza driver. Tom felt a little weird." Chapter 9, pg. 67

"Marge, you must understand that I don't *love* you,' Tom said into the mirror in Dickie's voice, with Dickie's higher pitch on the emphasized words, with the little growl in his throat at the end of the phrase that could be pleasant or unpleasant, intimate or cool, according to Dickie's mood." Chapter 10, pg. 78

"I can't make up my mind whether I like men or women, so I'm thinking of giving them both up." Chapter 10, pg. 80

"You were supposed to see the soul through the eyes, to see love through the eyes, the one place you could look at another human being and see what really went on inside, and 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." Chapter 11, pg. 89

"Dickie was just shoving him out in the cold. If he killed him on this trip, Tom thought, he could simply say that some accident had happened. He could --- He had just thought of something brilliant: he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself." Chapter 12, pg. 100

"Tom swung a left-handed blow with the oar against the side of Dickie's head. The edge of the oar cut a dull gash that filled with a line of blood as Tom watched." Chapter 12, pg. 104

"Where's Dickie?' she asked. 'He's in Rome.' Tom smiled easily, absolutely prepared. 'He's staying up there for a few days. I came down to get some of his stuff to take up to him.' 'Is he staying with somebody?' 'No, just in a hotel.'" Chapter 13, pg. 112

"A selfish, stupid bastard who had sneered at one of his best friends - Dickie certainly was one of his best friends - just because he suspected him of sexual deviation. Tom laughed at that phrase 'sexual deviation.' Where was the sex? Where was the deviation? He looked at Freddie and said low and bitterly, 'Freddie Miles, you're a victim of your own dirty mind.'" Chapter 15, pg. 147





"A final paragraph said that Greenleaf had just been requested by the Rome police to answer questions concerning the disappearance of Thomas Ripley, also a close friend of Greenleaf. Ripley had been missing for about three months, the paper said." Chapter 21, pg. 197

"After he had finished the letter he had made some more coffee and on Dickie's own Hermes he had written Dickie's will, bequeathing him his income and the money he had in various banks, and had signed it Herbert Richard Greenleaf, Jr." Chapter 23, pg. 215

"He loved possessions, not masses of them, but a select few that he did not part with. They gave a man self-respect. Not ostentation but quality, and the love that cherished the quality. Possessions reminded him that he existed, and made him enjoy his existence." Chapter 26, pg. 249

"Marge said earnestly, 'I just can't imagine Dickie ever being without his rings,' and Tom knew then that she hadn't guesses the answer, that her mind was miles up some other road." Chapter 26, pg. 251

"Underneath he would be as calm and sure of himself as he had been after Freddie's murder, because his story had been unassailable. Like the San Remo story. His stories were good because he imagined them intensely, so intensely that he came to believe them." Chapter 26, pg. 253

"The very chanciness of trying for all of Dickie's money, the peril of it, was irresistible to him." Chapter 28, pg. 276



# Adaptations

In 1960, Rene Clement adapted *The Talented Mr. Ripley* into a "French thriller" titled *Purple Noon*, or *Plein Soleil*. In relation to the novel, this film begins in media res, for Tom Ripley (Alain Delon) and Philippe Greenleaf (Maurice Ronet) are in Rome, and no intimation of Mr. Greenleaf's proposition to Tom is given until it is revealed in later discussions. The film's premise, in its totality, is the same: Tom desires Philippe's life, and murders him to get it. Significant differences occur, though, in the formation of the plot.

As the film opens, Tom and Philippe appear as close friends, but the homosexual undertones (and overtones) are absent. To iterate this distinction, the film places Tom and Philippe in a carriage with a woman whom they dupe into believing Philippe is blind. Both begin to kiss the woman, illustrating a triadic relationship that is only posited in the novel through Marge's and Tom's desires for Dickie. In this film, Tom is implicated in Philippe's love affair as his mirror—enacting the same act with a woman as Philippe is. This distinction is reemphasized through Marge's role. Tom as well as Philippe desires Clement's Marge (Marie Laforet).

An amorous fight between Philippe and Marge leads to her "escape" from the boat, leaving Tom with the opportunity to kill Philippe.

And yet even the circumstances surrounding, or denouement of, the murder is altered drastically. Philippe suspects Tom's plan to murder him, and directly asks him of it. Tom plays a game of cat and mouse with Philippe, telling him that he will be able to imitate Philippe's signature, and attain his money, with practice. Tom appears cold, and calculating, and even more deliberate than Highsmith's character, for Tom appears to have no fear at all—not even of water. Before Marge is sent ashore, Tom is set adrift—on the rowboat. Literally severed from the main boat, Tom despairs and anguishes as the hot sun burns him.

When rescued, Tom then moves in to kill Philippe.

Although Clement's Tom imitates Philippe's signature, feigns Philippe's identity, and murders Freddy, he is strikingly different. Marge mourns Philippe until Tom reenters her life and professes his love for her. After willing her "his" inheritance, Tom convinces Marge that he loves her more than Philippe could have, and becomes romantically involved with her. And yet one fatal flaw does catch him—a detail that Highsmith's Tom did not, and would not have, overlooked. Tom never cuts Philippe loose, literally, and, when the boat is put up for sale (ironically named "Marge" rather than "Pipistrello" of the novel), the body rises to the surface. The end of the film finds Tom awaiting Marge's return after witnessing the boat's sale (and, unbeknownst to him, the body's "unveiling") and being "found out" by police.

In 1999, Anthony Minghella adapted *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in a strikingly distinct way—from both Clement's film and Highsmith's text. As the film opens, Tom Ripley (Matt



Damon) appears—in fragments. Tom's face appears in slivers, as if shards of glass are revealing pieces of his identity. And when the title appears on the screen, it is written with a plethora of adjectives that appear in a rapid succession until it rests on "talented." From the onset of the film, facets of Tom's identity are inscribed upon him; he does not define himself. As we hear his voice-over narration, "If I could just go back. If I could rub everything out . . ." we learn of his desire to erase himself, and all that he had done. In this sense, Minghella's Tom reveals guilt through introspection and a retrospective perspective that neither Highsmith's nor Clement's Tom was able to attain. And Minghella's Tom is more sensitive; he is not the deliberate killer that Highsmith introduces. Tom is "talented" and "musical," as Peter SmithKingsley tells us at the film's end, and this "musicality" and "vulnerability" of Tom is what Minghella captures. This Tom is a musician, as is Dickie (instead of the painter in Highsmith's novel); for Minghella, relationships are worked out in "musical terms" so that Dickie's identification with jazz, "its mantra of freedom and existentialism," is juxtaposed with, and confronted by, Tom's "formal classicism," so that Tom, ultimately, must "improvise." Improvisation leads to fragmentation, and the many mirrors upon which Tom attempts to see himself illustrates how Minghella's film posits a character that is longing for completion, unity, but is prevented.

In an interview with *The Onion A.V.*

Club, Minghella distinguishes his film from Clement's, a film he likes "on its own terms," by stating, "What intrigued me about Ripley is that it seemed most of all about class, about the American experience of Europe, about the obsession of one man for another, and, most of all, conceptually about a man who commits murder and is not caught.

Purple Noon is about a man who commits murder and is caught: It's about a European in Europe, he's not obsessed with another man in any real sense at all, and it's not really a film about class . . ." Minghella's Tom Ripley is more like Highsmith's than Clement's, but he alters the ending to illustrate a "moral imperative." Minghella writes, "Ripley, always looking for love, always looking to love and be loved, has to kill his opportunity for love. He ends the movie alone, free, and in a hell of his own making . . . in annihilating self, assuming someone's identity, Ripley is condemned never to be free to be truly himself ever again." To create this "other" Tom, Minghella adapts the "murder" to illustrate that Tom's revelation of his love for Dickie (Jude Law), which leads to Dickie's taunts that he is "boring" and "a little girl," ultimate rejection, and violence, is, in fact, an "accident."

This way, Tom is even more "like" us, a victim of revealing too much desire and need, and denied that which he so needs.

The introduction of Peter Smith-Kingsley (Jack Davenport), brought to the forefront of the film where he was only a marginal character in the novel, illustrates Tom's capacity to love, and be loved, until his crime is almost brought to the surface— through Meredith's (Cate Blanchett) sighting of "Dickie" as well as Tom's increasing guilt. It is Peter who voices the revision of Tom's proclamation "I suppose I always thought—better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody" to read "Tom is not a nobody." Tom "has



someone to love him" but Tom can't let him, and Tom must crush Peter, because he needs too much, and does not have enough of himself to give. In the novel, Tom looks at Peter and thinks that "the same thing could happen with Peter . . . except that he didn't look enough like Peter" and Tom is ashamed to realize that he could have thought that he could do the same thing again. But Minghella's Peter represents a revision of Highsmith's text and Tom's relationship with Dickie; this relationship was and could have been based on mutual need, had Tom more of himself (not Dickie) to give. Even at the end of the film, Tom is confused about who he is to Peter as he implores, "Tell me some good things about Tom Ripley." But it's too late, as Minghella's Tom tells us, "I'm lost, too.

I'm going to be stuck in the basement, aren't I . . . and so nobody can ever find me."

Minghella explores the limits of film adaptation as he writes, "But if the intimate gestures of a novel, its private conversation between writer and reader, are not available to the filmmaker, they are exchanged for other, equally powerful, tools." Minghella's argument continues those of film theorists like Seymour Chatman who explore the limits and strengths of film and the "cinematic narrator." But what Purple Noon and Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* show us, perhaps more importantly than "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)" (to borrow from Chatman's essay's title), is what "interpretation" signifies.

Minghella's Tom is vulnerable and alienated; Clement's is a product of his society, and very much a part of the society.

Highsmith's Tom is somewhere in between; he is not remorseful, but haunted. He is alienated, but at the threshold of the society, and, as the novel ends, we envision that he will be able to glide into another, if not become fully embraced there. Minghella's Tom will be eternally locked in the cabin, as we leave him, trapped in his own thoughts.



## Key Questions

The problems associated with the formation of identity are central to *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. In the novel, Tom Ripley desires to be like Dickie Greenleaf, a longing that leads to murder. For Tom, class mobility is only a possibility once he is mistaken for another; Herbert Greenleaf thinks him to be "other" than he is. Tom then becomes "another" person when he is afforded the opportunity to recreate himself abroad. The issue of class is essential to understanding the novel because it is what provides the opportunities for characters like Dickie, Marge, and Freddie, while it denies Tom the ability to reconstruct his world. And since Tom cannot sustain Dickie's identity (once Dickie is "found out" for Freddie's murder), money becomes the most important gain for Tom's new life to continue without a hitch. Rethinking the significance of class distinctions in this novel forces us to examine what constitutes identity.

1. How do we define Tom Ripley? List his positive and negative qualities. Are these characteristics particular to him or shared with other characters? What conclusions can you draw from your findings?

2. Considering the title of the novel, what are Tom's "talents"? Compare how Tom defines himself to how others define him. Are the two perspectives similar or dissimilar? Why?

3. Who is the protagonist of this novel? Is there one? Who is the antagonist? What is the struggle?

4. How are issues of class played out in the context of the novel? What is Tom's background?

5. How are issues of gender played out in the context of the novel? Is Marge a strong female character? What does this tell us about the constitution of the "self"? If the "self" is informed by social constructs like class and gender, what does this tell us about identity?

6. What is the function of desire in the novel? What does Tom want from Dickie?

What does Marge want from Dickie?

How can we define "desire" and discuss its results?

7. Who is Dickie Greenleaf? What does he represent to the different characters?

What does he represent to us?

8. How does community function in the creation/reformulation of the self? What does this imply about "identity"?



9. What is the "American" self? Why is it important that all of these characters are abroad?

10. Discuss issues of narration. What is the difference between the reader's perspective on Tom and Tom's own perspective? What does the act of reading this novel allow the reader to do that Tom can't?



## Topics for Discussion

When he has dinner with the Greenleafs in New York, Tom promises them he will do everything he can to convince Dickie Greenleaf to return to the U.S. Does Tom keep his promise?

What are some of the factors that made Tom's childhood difficult? In your opinion, do they justify Tom's criminal acts as an adult?

Is Tom Ripley genuinely interested in other people, or does he just use them?

What is Tom Ripley's attitude towards men? Is he sexually attracted to women?

How are Dickie Greenleaf and Tom Ripley's relationships with Marge Sherwood different?

After Tom kills Freddie Miles and Dickie Greenleaf, is he wracked with guilt and remorse?

Why are Dickie Greenleaf's rings so important to Tom? Why does he keep them, even though he knows it is dangerous to have any of Dickie's possessions with him?

Why is walking into the police station in Venice and identifying himself as Tom Ripley the saddest thing Tom has ever done?

Tom Ripley becomes an accepted member of the wealthy winter colony in Venice. Why?

Why does Herbert Greenleaf stop looking for his missing son?

Does being amoral allow Tom to devote more energy to covering up his crimes than if he felt guilty?

What words are used for homosexual men in this novel?

How were attitudes about homosexuality different in the 1950s, when *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was first published? In what ways are they the same?

## Literary Precedents

The Talented Mr. Ripley is both like and unlike the text it alludes to—Henry James' *The Ambassadors*. The modernist impulse away from the unified self to the representation of "human subjectivity" illustrates a shift away from the omniscient narrator. In James, we find a narrator, who relays Strether's point of view, while calling its narration into question. In James' work, we glimpse the unconscious—what Strether is unable to consciously articulate and realize, but we are unable to process it all neatly, and flatly, as traditional omniscient narration allows.

Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* narrates Tom's story, while relaying Tom's point of view, but, like in James, narration allows us to piece together what is beneath the surface in addition to what is conscious thought. Like James, Highsmith explores what it means to be an American touring Europe, especially after the war had divided (and yet somehow unified) the chasm between the two lands. Exploring the very notion of "identity" through the eyes of the "expatriate," Highsmith continues the conversation begun by James, and turns it inward.

In psychoanalytic terms, Highsmith's novel is closely related to earlier works of literary "mirroring." Edgar Allen Poe's "William Wilson" begins with a narrator reluctant to tell his story, or reveal his name, and the reader gets the sense that he is repressing (or deliberately reconstructing) his identity as he pens the story. While the narrative differs (between first and third person narration) between the two works, "William Wilson" is like *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (and vice versa) due to the fact that Poe's character cannot fully realize himself. Even when he is faced with his mirrored reflection, smeared with blood, he almost fails to recognize what he has done. Like William Wilson, Tom Ripley deliberately keeps these two identities distinct; Freddie must be murdered when he sees Tom as "Dickie" and Tom even contemplates murdering Marge if she realizes too much. Similarly, in Poe's eerie style, William Wilson is denied (and denies) self-realization, and, instead, favors keeping his two "selves" separate, until he no longer can.

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is another text that introduces this idea of a literary "hall of mirrors," through which characters like Richard III and Hamlet have posited what identity signifies. Wilde's *Dorian Gray* is split—between the "idealized" self and the "real." Without a "moral conscience," Gray does as he pleases, and the idealized Gray bears the wounds of the character's ill actions, so that, finally, selfdestruction results when Gray can no longer deny his "self." But this hall of mirrors goes back still further, for the Brothers Grimm's version of "Snow White," where the queen begs the mirror's affirmation only to find that another version, her idealized self, exists elsewhere; she then resolves to kill the girl to subsume, and assume, her place.





## Related Titles

In 1950, Highsmith published *Strangers on a Train*, a novel from which Alfred Hitchcock adapted his famous film. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is Highsmith's fourth published novel, and the first of a series of novels featuring Tom Ripley: *Ripley Underground* (1970), *Ripley's Game* (1974), *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (1980), and *Ripley Under Water* (1990). As *The Talented Mr. Ripley* ends with Tom looking over his shoulder for policemen, and then to the taxi driver, indicating that Tom's journey is to continue, so do the subsequent novels follow Tom's perpetual struggles. Harrison writes that the central thread of the later Ripley novels is "domesticity," for Ripley weds Heloise (a character absent from this first work), obtains and retains a servant, Madame Annette, and his home, Belle Ombre. But the domesticity of these later Ripley novels is far different from the "domestic" realm of *Mongibello*, where Dickie, Marge, and Tom cohabit and entertain rather than sustain. And Ripley's newfound domesticity is distinct from that of Highsmith's novels that span 1957-1962, as Harrison argues, for domesticity in *Deep Water* (1957), *This Sweet Sickness* (1960), and *The Cry of the Owl* (1962) is "one of the most harrowing human experiences."

Highsmith's "domestic" novels of 1957-1962 are especially intriguing once we take into account their location. Set in "familial America," these novels explore the "American Dream," an illness that we witnessed Tom Ripley symptomatic of. Community is suspect and suspecting, and the lines between guilt and innocence are not so clearly drawn. Like in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Highsmith explores the role of the individual in society, but it is a different society—alienation is now "at home" in America. This societal "plague," alienation, reflects existential beliefs, and her characters, like Tom Ripley, at times appear like the "existential hero." Like Camus' *The Stranger*, Tom Ripley is isolated, and his actions are influenced by this realization.

But *Strangers on a Train* is perhaps more closely aligned to the tale of Tom Ripley evidenced in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* than the four subsequent Ripley novels, for it focuses on the relationship between two men, obsession, and murder. One man uses the other as "mirror," posits a "new" identity, and commits a crime to achieve this new "self." In *Strangers on a Train*, Guy Haines meets Charles Anthony Bruno, and a "relationship" is established, much by the insistence of Bruno, to a destructive end. In this work, we witness the dynamics of two men—both desiring certain ends and yet alienated from each other. The stakes are high, for one has the capacity to carry out the "plan" and makes a proposition that distresses the other. Here we have the microcosm of the plot of the first Ripley novel, but, with its variations, *Strangers on a Train* offers a different glimpse into the formulation and reconstruction of identities.



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