PALGRAVE STUDIES IN ADAPTATION AND VISUAL CULTURE

Patricia Highsmith on Screen

Edited by Wieland Schwanebeck and Douglas McFarland

Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture

This new series addresses how adaptation functions as a principal mode of text production in visual culture. What makes the series distinctive is its focus on visual culture as both targets and sources for adaptations, and a vision to include media forms beyond film and television such as videogames, mobile applications, interactive fiction and film, print and nonprint media, and the avant-garde. As such, the series will contribute to an expansive understanding of adaptation as a central, but only one, form of a larger phenomenon within visual culture. Adaptations are texts that are not singular but complexly multiple, connecting them to other pervasive plural forms: sequels, series, genres, trilogies, authorial oeuvres, appropriations, remakes, reboots, cycles and franchises. This series especially welcomes studies that, in some form, treat the connection between adaptation and these other forms of multiplicity. We also welcome proposals that focus on aspects of theory that are relevant to the importance of adaptation as connected to various forms of visual culture.

More information about this series at
http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14654

Wieland Schwanebeck · Douglas McFarland
Editors

Patricia Highsmith on Screen

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Wieland Schwanebeck
TU Dresden
Dresden, Germany

Douglas McFarland
Flagler College
St. Augustine, FL, USA

Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture
ISBN 978-3-319-96049-4 ISBN 978-3-319-96050-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96050-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018949622

Cover image: Warner Bros. Pictures/Photofest
Cover design: Laura de Grasse

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

The original version of the book was revised: The acknowledgements have been updated. The correction to the book is available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96050-0_19

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of a number of people. This includes, most of all, Julie Grossman and R. Barton Palmer, and the editorial staff at Palgrave Macmillan, especially Lina Aboujieb and Ellie Freedman.

Moreover, we are indebted to Frank Apel (*Kino in der Fabrik*), Jaimey Fisher (UC Davis), and Annette Reschke (*Verlag der Autoren*), and we would like to extend a special thanks to Hossein Amini, Hans W. Geissendörfer, Phyllis Nagy, and Wim Wenders, who not only generously agreed to be part of this project but were more than willing to share their Highsmith enthusiasm with us.

Chapter 5 is reprinted with revisions by permission from '*Bad, Infamy, Darkness, Evil, and Slime on Screen*' edited by Murray Pomerance, the State University of New York Press ©2004 State University of New York, All rights reserved.

Chapter 15 is taken from '*The Logic of Images*', Copyright Wim Wenders and Reproduced by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Erin Altman is a Ph.D. student at the University of California, Davis. Her area of research is applied linguistics, with emphasis on social, cultural, and stylistic approaches to language instruction through the use of film. She has recently presented papers on the role of cultural identification and worldliness in Franz Kafka's *The Great Wall of China* and the development of the 'Multilingual Subject' (Kramsch 2009) in the language classroom. Her recent and current projects are located in the areas of systemic functional linguistics, reflective writing, and identity development via multilingual and transnational film.

Christopher Breu is a professor of English at Illinois State University, where he teaches classes in contemporary literature and culture as well as critical theory. He is the author of *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics* (Minnesota, 2014) and *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minnesota, 2005). He is also the co-editor of a recent special issue of *Symplokē* on 'Materialism' and the forthcoming *Noir Affect* (Fordham, 2019).

David Greven is a professor of English at the University of South Carolina in the United States. He publishes in the fields of film studies and nineteenth-century American literature. His books include *Intimate Violence: Hitchcock, Sex, and Queer Theory* (OUP, 2017), *Ghost Faces: Hollywood and Post-Millennial Masculinity* (SUNY P, 2016), and *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature* (Routledge, 2016).

Thomas Leitch is a professor of English at the University of Delaware. His most recent books are *Wikipedia U: Knowledge, Authority, and Liberal Education in the Digital Age* (2014) and *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (2017). He is currently working on *The History of American Literature on Film*.

William Mahan is a Ph.D. candidate in the German Department at the University of California, Davis. His dissertation research is focused on humanity's relationship to ghosts of the past in German and Austrian literature and film from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day, considering societal changes in government and ideology as well as technological progress. He has recently published articles on ghosts and image economies in Christian Petzold's films in *Senses of Cinema*, and on the tourist gaze in Christoph Ransmayr's travelogue *Atlas eines ängstlichen Mannes* in *The Journal of Austrian Studies*.

Catherine Schultz McFarland is retired as Professor of Art History at Flagler College. She did her undergraduate work at Smith College and her graduate work at Emory University. Professor McFarland has taught at the Atlanta College of Art and at Oglethorpe University. She focuses on semiotics, particularly the iconography of mythology, and has published on sixteenth-century Flemish painting. She is currently working on a book on Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Douglas McFarland is retired Professor of English and Classical Studies at Flagler College, Saint Augustine, Florida, where he taught Renaissance literature, Latin and Greek. He has published on sixteenth-century English and French literature, as well as numerous articles and chapters on film. He is the co-editor (with Wesley King) of *John Huston as Adaptor* (2017).

Alison L. McKee, Ph.D. is a professor in the Radio-Television Film program (Department of Film & Theatre) at San José State University in the United States. She specializes in American film history, theory, and criticism. McKee earned her B.A. and M.A. in English and Ph.D. in film and digital media, focusing particularly on classical American cinema. She is the author of numerous works, including *The Woman's Film of the 1940s: Gender, Narrative, and History* (Routledge, 2014) and "'Think of Me Fondly': Voice, Body, Affect, and Performance in Prince/Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*" (in *Studies in Musical Theatre* 7:3 2014).

Kristopher Mecholsky is a scholar of crime narrative and adaptation who teaches at Louisiana State University, where he earned his doctorate in 2012. His first book (co-authored with David Madden and published in 2011) is a critical overview of James M. Cain. Mecholsky has published essays on film, crime fiction, and the South with Scarecrow, McFarland, Salem, and LSU Presses, as well as with *South Atlantic Review*, *The Baker Street Journal*, *The Faulkner Journal*, and others. He is presently at work on a book on Burt Reynolds and on a longer project on race and ethnicity in American gangster cinema.

Robert Miklitsch is a professor in the English Department at Ohio University. He is the editor of *Psycho-Marxism* (1998) and *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands* (2014) as well as the author of *From Hegel to Madonna: Towards a General Economy of Commodity Fetishism* (1998), *Roll Over Adorno: Critical Theory, Popular Culture, Audiovisual Media* (2006), *Siren City: Sound and Source Music in Classic American Noir* (2011), and *The Red and the Black: American Film Noir in the 1950s* (2017). He has essays forthcoming on *Young Man with a Horn*, *Jailhouse Rock/A Hard Day's Night*, and the 1950s serial killer film.

Bran Nicol is a professor of English Literature and Head of the School of Literature and Languages at the University of Surrey, UK. He specializes in twentieth- and twenty-first century fiction, literary and cultural theory, and crime fiction and film. His books include monographs on Iris Murdoch and D. M. Thomas, *The Private Eye: Detectives in Film* (Reaktion, 2013), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (CUP, 2009), and *Stalking* (Reaktion, 2006), which has been translated into Italian, Korean and Japanese. He is the editor of *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel* (Edinburgh UP, 2002) and co-editor of *Crime Culture* (Continuum, 2012).

Murray Pomerance is an independent scholar living in Toronto. He is the editor of numerous series, and author of many books, including *The Eyes Have It: Cinema and the Reality Effect* (2013), *Alfred Hitchcock's America* (2013), and the BFI Classics volumes on *Marnie* (2014) and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (2016).

Wieland Schwanebeck is a Junior Lecturer in the Institute of English and American Studies at TU Dresden (Germany). His fields of interest include impostor characters, Gender and Masculinity Studies, British Film History, and Adaptation Studies. His most recent publications

include the Metzler Handbook of Masculinity Studies (co-ed. with Stefan Horlacher and Bettina Jansen, 2016), *Reassessing the Hitchcock Touch* (ed., 2017), and a forthcoming monograph on the history of twinship in English literature.

Klara Stephanie Szlezák is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer in American Studies at the University of Passau, Germany. Previously, she taught at the universities of Regensburg, Osnabrück, and Augsburg. She is the author of *"Canonized in History": Literary Tourism and 19th-Century Writers' Houses in New England* (Winter, 2015) and the co-editor of *Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Her other research interests and areas of expertise, besides film studies, include U.S. preservation history and museum studies, visual culture studies, as well as Jewish American history and culture.

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Patricia Highsmith on Screen

Douglas McFarland and Wieland Schwanebeck

It's Murder at the Movies!

Patricia Highsmith's third novel, *The Blunderer* (1954), opens with a fateful flight from the movies. Bookstore owner Melchior Kimmel buys a ticket for a film called *Marked Woman*,[1] even though he is oblivious to its sexed-up poster and, for that matter, to the film itself (*TB* 1).[2] Kimmel is merely looking for an alibi, timing his arrival at the theater so that he will be seen by people before sneaking out again to go through with his plan for killing his wife. The two existing adaptations of the novel flesh out the scene in different ways: Claude Autant-Lara's *Le meurtrier* (*Enough Rope*, 1963) presents Kimmel's trip to the cinema as a flashback that may or may not be imagined by Walter, his antagonist, during his own excursion to a movie-theater, and due to the medium's lack of introspection, it remains for the viewer to decide whether Kimmel (whose thick-lensed

D. McFarland (✉)
Flagler College, St. Augustine, FL, USA
e-mail: dmcfarland@flagler.edu

W. Schwanebeck
TU Dresden, Dresden, Germany
e-mail: wieland.schwanebeck@tu-dresden.de

W. Schwanebeck and D. McFarland (eds.), *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*, Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96050-0_1

glasses suggest that he is unlikely to get much pleasure out of anything visual) is executing a carefully hatched plan, or whether it is the film that triggers his murderous rage. Andy Goddard's *A Kind of Murder* (2016), by contrast, runs with Highsmith's original concept, with Eddie Marsan playing a far more cold-blooded version of Kimmel, who makes sure the other patrons notice him entering a screening of *BUtterfield 8* (1960). Still, the nexus between going to the movies and committing murder is equally present here, an impression that is supported by the credits which are laid over Kimmel's entrance into the theater: they inform the viewers that they are watching "a KILLER FILMS production".

The scene is an apt emblem of Patricia Highsmith's own rather ambivalent attitude towards cinema, an institution of which she remained notoriously suspicious. Not only was she reported to generally dislike the movies (including those based on her novels), she remained a firm opponent of television (Schenkar 2009, 275), though both media provided a regular source of income for her throughout almost half a century. But there was not much love lost between Highsmith and the adaptation industry; it arguably remained a passionless marriage of convenience. If Kimmel (a bookworm reluctantly drawn from his natural habitat) seeks out the movie theatre to prepare for the kill, Highsmith occasionally did the same in order to make a *killing*, and the two endeavors sometimes conflate in her work. Howard Ingham, the protagonist in *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969), is a novelist who travels to Tunisia to try his hand at a movie script (in spite of knowing that "film scripts, even television plays, were not his forte", 4), but he ends up killing someone with his typewriter—an event that appears to inconvenience him mainly because the typewriter will need a repair job (*TOF* 102). Highsmith may have found the dark humor in writing for the screen, yet her tempestuous reactions to the films based on her works strongly suggest that the process of being adapted was rather painful to her.

Highsmith's books have always served as a popular source for film adaptations. There has been no decade without at least one new Highsmith adaptation in the United States as well as in Europe since Alfred Hitchcock turned her debut novel, *Strangers on a Train* (1950), into his classic suspense film of the same name (1951). The list of directors who have adapted Highsmith includes renowned filmmakers like Liliana Cavani, Claude Chabrol, Todd Haynes, Anthony Minghella, and Wim Wenders, which means that studying a cinema based on Highsmith affords plenty of opportunities to assess the work of particular auteurs and their methods and approaches. These adaptations provide a cross-section

of adaptation strategies that reflect shifts in moral ethos, industry practices, cinematic movements, gender politics, and different media representations. The longevity of Highsmith's popularity as a source for adaptation opens up the possibility for dialogue between adapters—for instance, when Claude Chabrol makes a film of *The Cry of the Owl* (*Le cri du hibou*, 1987), he may be more interested in the Hitchcockian motif of voyeurism than in adapting Highsmith.[3] At the most extreme, this approach produces 'indirect' adaptations of her work which go so far as to obliterate her signature altogether, no doubt encouraged by Hitchcock's characteristic appropriation of source material.

In addition to opening up a dialogue between individual filmmakers (rather than just between Highsmith and her adapters), this book addresses the different adaptive strategies, the evolution of film noir (including its themes and aesthetics across different time periods and filmmaking-traditions), queer identity politics, and the fragility of genre conventions which are simultaneously enacted *and* subverted in Highsmith adaptations. While these films owe a considerable intertextual debt to influential 1950s auteurs like Hitchcock or Douglas Sirk, they do not simply follow in their footsteps, and thus cannot simply be categorized as new iterations of well-known genres. What we call a Highsmith adaptation entails a degree of adaptation in a different sense of the word, as characters like the highly adaptable Tom Ripley (see Schwanebeck 2013), not to mention Highsmith's various other murderous con men, adapt to traditional scripts (of identity, class, gender, and genre) but expose them to be hollow and out of date. Highsmith films reflect this state of affairs through various adaptive and aesthetic strategies, and their glossy, period-drama surface is often deceptive. The way they repeatedly revolve around the notions of (identity) forgery and criminality (themes which are addressed in various chapters of this book) suggests that there is, ultimately, something criminal about the very idea of adaptation to begin with, as Thomas Leitch emphasizes in his opening chapter.

Highsmith's thematic focus on adaptation itself (especially in the generic context of film noir) extends to the notions of crime and illicit desires, which makes the films resonate significantly with paradigms as diverse as noir, queer cinema, and melodrama. At their core, Highsmith adaptations are psychological thrillers in which the façade of respectability is always threatened with the eruption of violence and the discovery of skeletons in the closet, and in their own way, they reiterate the rise of postwar noir with their stories of everymen who allow themselves to

be corrupted when opportunity knocks. In the process of adaptation, the postwar political subtexts of Highsmith's heroes may not exactly have been obliterated—even Wenders' dreamlike Highsmith homage *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2000) is a portrait gallery of America's forgotten, subaltern subjects of the postwar era—yet they are often buried, palimpsest-like, underneath layers of postmodern playfulness. By a curious coincidence, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the quintessential story of All-American heroism, casts three actors in the squadron of upright young soldiers who would subsequently play Tom Ripley.[4] There is a certain logical consistency to this curious constellation, not least because the spectrum of the actors' roles suggests historical continuity. The men returning from the war would advance to become the high achievers of the postwar era, yet watching Matt Damon take off James Ryan's uniform and put on Tom Ripley's (borrowed) Princeton jacket a year later provokes a nightmarish thought that always resonates as subtext in contemporary melodrama about *phonies*: "the possibility that the idea of the unique American individual was not just hiding beneath a phony mask, but rather no longer existed at all" (Cheever 2010, 7); an idea that permeates *Mad Men* (2007–2015) as much as it does Sloan Wilson's *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), published the same year as the first *Ripley* novel and an intriguing companion piece to the latter.[5]

This kind of cultural environment produces a characteristic branch of film noir in the postwar years, on which Highsmith leaves her own characteristic stamp. In typical noir fashion, her novels firmly reject the idea that the world is, on the whole, morally intact, or that there is any functional narrative of authenticity or a stable moral framework to be found. In his compelling reading of noir films centered around paintings, Mark Osteen suggests that noir ultimately reveals all identities to be forgeries and to be based on "untenable assumption[s] about originality" (2013, 131), and this idea could well be extended to the equally protean and ruthless characters who permeate Highsmith's universe. Though the enigmatic nature of these characters does not allow for straightforward identification, it certainly makes for intriguing adaptive challenges. Marc Rosenberg suggests that it is Highsmith's use of "psychological uncertainty" which makes her novels so attractive for filmmakers (2017, 48); a view that is echoed in various testimonies of filmmakers that we have gathered for the final section of this book. The reception of the films is in itself complicated by the contradictory persona of Highsmith, who has only recently found her way into serious academic study.

The Unknown Ms. Highsmith

Unlike other famous eccentrics of her generation—say, Truman Capote (who wrote Highsmith a reference for the artists' colony Yaddo in exchange for a stay in her New York apartment)—Highsmith has not yet been subjected to a biopic, but this may well be just a matter of time. After all, fictionalized versions of the author have already featured in texts that must count as Highsmith adaptations in their own right: there is Joanna Murray-Smith's play *Switzerland* (2014), which belongs to the growing body of postmodern texts about eminent artists who are challenged to cat-and-mouse games by aspiring young biographers and fans, as well as Jill Dawson's novel *The Crime Writer* (2016), a psychological thriller very much indebted to Highsmith's brand of suspense fiction and a number of her most characteristic tropes. Such fantasies are inspired by the sheer amount of Highsmith anecdotes which remain in circulation and which also permeate much of the scholarship devoted to her work. Up until a few years ago, Highsmith's biographers were far more prolific than the critics who investigated her writings: three comprehensive biographies have appeared since her death in 1995 (Meaker 2003; Wilson 2003; Schenkar 2009). By alluding to Highsmith's most famous novelistic creation, the title of Schenkar's volume (*The Talented Miss Highsmith*) indicates that these books tend to conflate the person with the oeuvre. And indeed, the key to reading Highsmith's novels and short stories has frequently been sought in looking at the circumstances of her life, her reportedly difficult character, and her controversial politics. Some legitimate interest in Highsmith's close affiliation with the LGBT community aside, most of this kind of criticism tends to get caught up in the author's legendary, misanthropic character disposition. From the vast number of stories attributed to Highsmith, who spent the last years of her life as a recluse in Switzerland, emerges the distorted image of a fundamentally ill-tempered creative mind, part mysterious cat-lady, part Wicked Witch of the West.

She presents us, therefore, with the case of an author nearly overshadowed by her public persona: that of the eccentric who enjoyed provocation. The considerable interest devoted to Highsmith in feminist circles and in the LGBT community may account for some of this, as biographical approaches to revising the literary canon are part of their MO. That these attempts never really took off in Highsmith's case certainly has to do with her outspoken refusal to write exemplary, positive female characters and to fully adapt to literary circles and movements. In her introduction to one of Highsmith's most overtly political novels,

Edith's Diary (1977), Denise Mina rejects the idea that the author pursues a proper feminist agenda, deeming her "an equal-opportunities misanthropist" (2015, n.p.). Not only did Highsmith publish a collection of short stories provocatively titled *Little Tales of Misogyny* (1974), her novels keep returning to the central image of the fatal bond between two men (Mawer 2004, 55–144), to such an extent that some critics have accused her of being monothematic (Abel 2007, 115). Homoerotic desire (though not limited to men) permeates her novels as much as nihilism, murder, and the figure of the con man.

While Highsmith is far from a complete unknown, she remains a dark horse, and given the popularity of some of her novels and the fact that she has long turned into a household name and into a shorthand for a certain kind of moral fabric which informs her writing (a quality she shares with canonical authors like Franz Kafka), the relative lack of in-depth research into Highsmith's work is somewhat surprising. She left behind 22 novels and 8 collections of short stories and essays, as well as a few select pieces in other genres, and though she was without a publisher at the time of her death in the United States, her work has never really been out of print. New Highsmith adaptations are produced every few years, yet at the same time, her popularity amongst some of the most renowned auteurs of world cinema was not necessarily to her advantage. As an authorial 'brand' of her own, Highsmith has only recently resurfaced properly: her novels are on the academic curriculum, countless newspaper features have been written about her, prominent writers like Joyce Carol Oates (2005) and Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk (2006) have come forward to sing her praises, Highsmith adaptations have actually been advertised *as* Highsmith adaptations, and a new generation of thriller writers has voiced its sheer indebtedness to her. Without Highsmith, no *Before I Go to Sleep* (S. J. Watson 2011), no *Gone Girl* (Gillian Flynn 2012), no *Woman in the Window* (A. J. Finn 2018), and no *Tangerine* (Christine Mangan 2018).[6]

Academic criticism has also been catching up. The rediscovery of Highsmith, which coincides approximately with the release of Minghella's adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), has produced a number of critical works, including several monographs (Harrison 1997; Peters 2011; Schwanebeck 2014), a special issue of the journal *Clues* (Peters 2015), and numerous scholarly articles that subject Highsmith's novels to close readings with regard to their queerness, their transatlantic perspective, their twisted morals, and the deceptive nature of "her flat,

spare simplicity" (Bordwell 2015). That most of these scholarly efforts only came *after* Highsmith's death appears baffling, though the fact that she spent the biggest part of her writing career in a self-inflicted exile in Europe certainly played a role. Moreover, it was mainly scholars working in the field of crime fiction who devoted attention to Highsmith, which was not necessarily to her advantage: her books do not follow the traditional patterns of detection, and reading them *as* crime novels in the traditional sense of the word must necessarily lead to disappointment. Amy Sargeant's history of British cinema even lists her as an icon of *British* crime fiction (2005, viii), maybe because it seems so obvious to associate her with the 'Queens of Crime' like Agatha Christie or Dorothy L. Sayers—not that she has much in common with either of them. Her work puts much more emphasis on the nature of crime and its repercussions, as well as the moral dilemmas and the psychological disposition of her murderers. Her novels are *about* crime, but she is neither interested in the character of the detective nor in a successful resolution of the mystery in the classical sense. Highsmith's murderers often go unpunished, the crime remains unresolved, and her books conclude with nihilistic glee "that life is little more than an absurdity and a cheat, when not a downright horror" (Dirda 2009). Where the crime genre "presents a world in which crime is identifiable, soluble and explicable", Highsmith facilitates a "fastidious dismantling of the conventional categories of guilt and justice" (Bell 1990, 1–2). This is why John Malkovich's version of Tom Ripley (in Cavani's adaptation of *Ripley's Game*, 2002) can confidently assert that "no one is watching", for even *when* the law is watching (as in the final shot of Hans W. Geissendörfer's adaptation of *The Glass Cell* [1978]), it is incapable of making a difference.[7] The only ones who can be relied on to watch are we, the viewers, whom Highsmith turns into accomplices.

Clearly, there is no comfort zone to which we can return—characters like Tom Ripley not only illustrate Hannah Arendt's famous observation on "the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*" (2006, 252), but they expand it dialectically. Evil happens against the backdrop of the mundane, and "the switch from bourgeois order to grotesque violence is always a possibility in her novels" (Knight 2004, 147). This creates suspense of a kind, though it is a far cry from what is usually understood by the term in discussions of Hitchcockian cinema. Highsmith's own manifesto on the topic, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* (1983), takes its cue from literary rather than cinematic ancestors like Fyodor Dostoevsky and Henry James and defines the suspense story as "one in which the

possibility of violent action, even death, is close all the time" (*PWSF* xi). The suspense inherent in her fiction occurs on the level of individual psychology and should not be confused for classic cinematic suspense, which is frequently based on the audience's privileged authorial viewpoint and thus on discrepant awareness (see Smith 2000, 18–22). Even though Highsmith's use of the term bears little resemblance to Hitchcock's apodictic 'bomb under the table' wisdom, her association with the director remains integral to her status in cultural memory and has informed her adaptation history.

Haunted by Hitchcock

Having her debut novel adapted by Alfred Hitchcock was either the best or the worst thing that could have happened to Highsmith. From a purely commercial standpoint, the gamble paid off, certainly for Hitchcock: following the critical and commercial disappointments of *Under Capricorn* (1949) and *Stage Fright* (1950), *Strangers on a Train* heralded his most well-received decade as a filmmaker, and is widely considered one of his definitive masterpieces. Inevitably, the success proved a double-edged sword for Highsmith. As a young novelist, she certainly could use the money that Hitchcock paid for the rights, yet *Strangers on a Train* proved no exception from Hitchcock's general rule of diminishing the contribution of the authors. In his conversation with Truffaut, he simply refers to *Strangers* as "a novel I selected myself" (1984, 193), and while much space is dedicated to the difficult collaboration with Raymond Chandler,[8] he does not go into detail regarding the merits of the book or its author. Highsmith certainly "cannot have been mollified when Hitchcock told her, on meeting her years later, that 'really she should pay him to make the film, it would mean so much to her in terms of later reputation and sales'" (Leitch 2008, 65). Her inevitably complicated relationship with the Hitchcock brand may have inspired our choice when it came to picking the cover for this book: it is from *Strangers on a Train* and shows Hitchcock's own daughter, Patricia (!), in one of her few film appearances, observing Bruno's mock strangulation of Mrs. Cunningham with mixed feelings. Following this demonstration of Hitchcockian black humor turned serious, the film's very own Patricia H. says, "I thought he was murdering *me*."

More than 80% of all Hitchcock films are based on literary sources, but in the public perception, they simply do not exist *as* adaptations: *Psycho* (1960) is remembered as an Alfred Hitchcock picture, not as a film based on a Robert Bloch novel.[9] However, the 1950s in particular demonstrate how the Hitchcock factory was in constant demand of new stories. Hitchcock not only put out one or two films as a director each year, his new forays into television required a constant influx of material which had to correspond to what was by then more or less established as the Hitchcock brand: suspenseful stories about murder, preferably with a macabre twist. *Strangers on a Train* put Highsmith on the map and, according to her own 1989 afterword to *The Price of Salt* (*POS* 310), pigeonholed her as a 'suspense novelist', which also meant that she now qualified for this pantheon of prolific writers. Following the release of *Strangers*, Hitchcock approached her to ask for new material, and while Joan Schenkar notes that these talks "came to nothing" (2009, 320), Highsmith was not completely off the radar in the Hitchcock universe. Her novel *This Sweet Sickness* (1960) was adapted into *Annabel*, a 1962 episode of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* and yet another example of how the Hitchcock brand absorbs Highsmith.

Not only was the script for *Annabel* written by Robert Bloch (another writer who both benefitted *and* suffered from his association with Hitchcock),[10] the episode also had John L. Russell, *Psycho*'s director of photography, on camera. In addition, Dean Stockwell's performance as David Kelsey evokes memories of the characteristic blend of charismatic handsomeness and nervous tics that Anthony Perkins brought to the role of Norman Bates—Perkins would later host *Chillers* (1990), an anthology show based on Highsmith's short stories. Given these credentials, it is not so surprising that *Annabel* never really subscribes to the slow and gradual descent into madness that is at the heart of Highsmith's novel, and rather goes for an ending that clearly aims to emulate the climax of *Psycho*: David leads his colleague Linda into the bedroom to meet Annabel (whom he has strangulated in the scene before), and Linda's reaction on seeing the corpse (whom David, in his madness, believes to be alive) echoes the moment when Lila Crane finds the mummified body of Mrs. Bates in her rocking chair. The last cut of the episode hints at David's necrophilic urges, and his final line ("From now on, we're gonna be together.") makes *Annabel* resonate even more with Norman Bates's

complete fusion with the identity of 'Mother'. The Gothic overtones of the material are further emphasized by a subtle change in spelling: *This Sweet Sickness*'s Anna*belle* becomes Anna*bel*, who now carries echoes of Edgar Allan Poe's *Annabel Lee* (1849), the quintessential embodiment of love beyond the grave (Perry and Sederholm 2014, 255).

Highsmith may have found herself overwhelmed by the sheer force of Hitchcock's signature, yet it was on the strength of *Strangers on a Train* that she continued to receive commissions for TV work throughout the 1950s, contributing to various anthology shows in the one or other form. Producers would scout publications like *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* for suitably macabre short stories and then acquire the rights in order to fill the program slots. During the 1950s, Highsmith wrote for magazines like *Black Mask*, though she later dismissed these efforts (Schenkar 2009, 160), and the turnover was often quite fast: a 1957 issue of *Ellery Queen's* included her story *The Perfect Alibi*, and its adaptation (penned by future *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry) was produced the same year for *The Fireside Theatre*.[11]

Roddenberry is not the only prominent name amongst the impressive list of personnel with which Highsmith's career intersected during these years. John Frankenheimer directed a Highsmith adaptation for a 1956 episode of *Climax!*,[12] and the same year saw future Academy Award winner Franklin J. Schaffner direct a one-hour version of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* for *Studio One*, though neither of these exist on DVD or could be located by us in any archive.[13] It remains a woefully unexplored chapter in Highsmith's career, unlike her gradual rise to prominence in Europe. In France, for instance, the association with Hitchcock certainly helped her gain some popularity amongst intellectual circles, particularly amongst the Hitchcock-adoring Nouvelle Vague filmmakers who were just beginning to graduate from writing criticism towards making films. While Highsmith's stories were still featured on American anthology shows, French directors prepared their big-screen adaptations of Highsmith, with René Clément's *Plein soleil* (*Purple Noon*, 1960) being the most prominent effort. Claude Chabrol's hijacking of the same material for his own version of Ripley, *Les biches* (*The Does*, 1968), must have given Highsmith some idea that their ethos as adapters was not greatly above that of Hitchcock,[14] who had made sure that *Strangers on a Train* effectively ceased to be Highsmith's property, as was typical of his adaptive policy: "The resulting film would subsume the literary original as an artistic and cultural document to

the point that Hitchcock became virtual owner of the work and title." (Raubicheck and Srebnick 2011, 25) Tellingly, various subsequent versions of the 'traded murders' plot were marketed not as Highsmith adaptations but as Hitchcock remakes or homages, with Warner Brothers making the most of the property and producing several new versions of *Strangers* on television and on the big screen. *Once You Kiss a Stranger* (1969) may timidly announce in the credits that it was "*suggested* by a novel by Patricia Highsmith", but the film has Hitchcock rather than Highsmith written all over it. Not only does it follow Hitchcock in making a professional sportsman out of Highsmith's architect, it also adopts the previous film's sanitized happy ending, reuniting the protagonist with his wife and having the Bruno character (here recast as a woman named Diana) arrested by the police. *Once You Kiss a Stranger*'s climactic 'chased by a dune buggy' scene (which has no equivalent in Highsmith) evokes memories of the cropduster sequence in *North by Northwest* (1959),[15] and Diana's sadistic harpooning of a little girl's beach ball in the very first scene immediately makes it clear that the film is tipping its hat to Hitchcock (Fig. 1.1). The scene

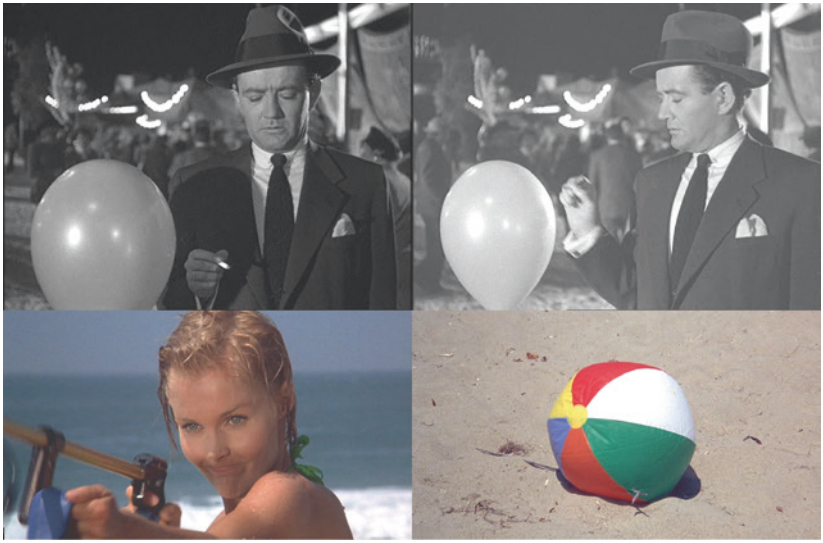

Fig. 1.1 *Once You Kiss a Stranger* pays homage to Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*

alludes to the moment in *Strangers* when Robert Walker bursts a kid's balloon with his burning cigarette, and the gender reversal as much as the change of scenery (from nighttime fairground to the beach in broad daylight) not only update and somehow revise Highsmith's (and Hitchcock's) story, they also signal a transition from film noir towards a new type of aesthetics.[16]

While the focus of this book is, understandably, not exclusively on the Highsmith/Hitchcock connection, both make for intriguing bed-fellows: the American stranded in Europe and the expatriate Brit who successfully adapted to the American studio system; two strong personalities frequently at odds with potential collaborators. For every author or screenwriter written out of history by Hitchcock's authorial signature, there is a Highsmith putdown leveled at one of the directors who allegedly 'mingled' with her work: there are wildly contrasting accounts of her reactions towards Wim Wenders' *Der amerikanische Freund* (*The American Friend*, 1977),[17] she is said to have dismissed *Dites-lui que je l'aime* (1977), Claude Miller's adaptation of *This Sweet Sickness* (1960), as "kinda crappy" (Wilson 2003, 363), and she rarely held back when she felt that directors had dressed up her work "in sentimentalism and moralism" (Arn 2015). Viewed from this angle, *Strangers on a Train* might be a more meta-reflexive story than it has been given credit for. If detecting, the key operation at work in crime fiction, is akin to the process of writing and interpreting, as has often been claimed (see Hühn 1987), then maybe the two strangers who lend each other a hand in order to commit the perfect murder are, ultimately, ciphers for the adapter and the one whose work is adapted: one is instrumental to the work of the other, and the crime cannot be pinned exclusively on either one of them.

Both Highsmith and Hitchcock were known to toy with the role of the criminal. In one of the iconic prologues filmed for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–1965), Hitchcock appears as the sole suspect in a police line-up, having been arrested on *Suspicion*, as well as for being *Notorious* and a *Man Who Knew Too Much*: "I'm sorry, sir", a shamefaced Hitchcock asserts, "but my family was hungry." Though Highsmith is usually not associated with PR stunts of this kind, a 1974 interview for Swiss television sees her reduplicate the skit and be 'arrested' for the

Fig. 1.2 Hitchcock and Highsmith: Partners in crime

crimes committed in her novels (Fig. 1.2), and while Hitchcock acts the part of the repentant criminal (as is evidenced by his facial expression), Highsmith retains a smirk that signals to the viewer that she is proud of her 'crimes', after all.[18] Her most Hitchcockian endeavor of that variety must surely be *A Gift for Murder* (1982), a playful *Ripley* adaptation produced for British television in which she and her creation exist on the same plane.

Thus, Highsmith has arguably flirted with these Hitchcockian associations, with the result that popular culture continues to view her through the prism of Hitchcock.[19] A number of Highsmith films are sold with the respective stamps of approval on their covers: the DVD of Hossein Amini's *The Two Faces of January* (2014) comes with a quote that promises "the shivery, sexy suspense of a Hitchcock Thriller", while the quote chosen to garnish the DVD of *A Kind of Murder* goes so far as to proclaim that "Hitchcock would be proud", which suggests that Hitchcock must be thought of as a kind of father figure to a cinema based on Highsmith. While her history with Hitchcock cannot be easily dismissed (indeed, a number of chapters in this book will examine it more closely), Highsmith's adaptation history cannot be reduced to the Hitchcock bond, and the sheer variety of topics and critical approaches gathered in this volume reflects this.

Structure of This Volume

Patricia Highsmith on Screen provides, in a single volume, essays devoted to films based on Highsmith's work, as well as interviews with Highsmith adapters. The four sections into which individual chapters have been arranged are preceded by Tom Leitch's programmatic chapter on the notion of adaptation as a criminal endeavor. Leitch examines *The Blunderer* and its two film versions as a study in the unlicensed, immoral behavior of maladaptation that is indicative of the forgery and hyper-adaptability that permeates Highsmith's novels.

The first section of the book (*Doubles, Copies, and Strangers*) assesses the dualisms inherent in her work, and features several essays surrounding Highsmith's complex relationship with Hitchcock and the long adaptive history of *Strangers on a Train*. The section also includes two chapters on Highsmith's most adaptable and enduring creation, the murderous con man Tom Ripley, who has enjoyed an incredibly diverse adaptation history. Ripley is equally present, of course, in the following section (*Queer Encounters*), which is dedicated to queer cinema. Highsmith adaptations enjoy a very fruitful relationship with the latter, particularly since Minghella's *Talented Mr. Ripley* and Haynes's critically acclaimed *Carol* (2015), both of which are examined in detail here with regard to their singular status as queer narratives at the intersection of independent filmmaking and mainstream cinema. The third and most comprehensive section of the book (*Aesthetic, Mythic and Cultural Transactions*) offers comparative and transatlantic perspectives on adaptation. It addresses the mythological intertexts that feed into films like *The Two Faces of January*, but also the distinct European brand of noir that various filmmakers developed on the basis of Highsmith's novels, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. This was the period that saw European auteurs with transatlantic ambitions (including Claude Chabrol and Wim Wenders) turn to Highsmith, a constellation that produced some of these filmmakers' finest and most successful films, but also the one or other 'Europudding' like the Anglo-French anthology series *Chillers*, a seldom-discussed Highsmith adaptation that is analyzed in this section of the collection.[20] The book concludes with conversations with Highsmith adapters, who recall their experiences in adapting the novels of Highsmith and/or knowing her in person: Wim Wenders (who looks back on the shoot of *The American Friend*), Hans W. Geissendörfer (who directed adaptations of *The Glass Cell* and *Edith's Diary*), Hossein