

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ON SCREEN



Week Three
'The Cries of January'

Welcome to *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*

Week Three

For the last three weeks, we've taken our first steps into our exploration of Patricia Highsmith's work and, albeit with a smidge of armchair psychology, discussed a little of what we might glean about the author herself from the types of stories she chose to tell – and what we might glean about the world from our continued appetite to have them re-told.

One of the things that has become clear is that, historically, a greater number of European directors were initially drawn to bring Ms Highsmith's novels to cinema screens than mainstream Hollywood or British storytellers. But then, in the 21st Century, an enormous shift appears to have occurred with numerous works being either made or remade, particular in the latter half of the 2000s, leading up to the here and now. (*Never fear, Ripley is making his talented way towards in the week to come.*)

Why is that?

What is there, inherent in the stories, that spoke more clearly to continental filmmakers than their English-speaking compatriots?

And is it something that Patricia Highsmith herself shared? After all, she became an ex-pat early in her life, after her fractured youth in both Texas and New York. Her life ended, in fact, in Switzerland in 1995, at the age of 74.

Perhaps it was the relative openness of European cinema, during the first decades of cinema, whether in subject matter or simply the apparent lack of allergy towards morally grey characters.

Of course, we're talking in broad strokes here. It's not as though American cinema, for instance, is without anti-heroes, or European cinema without wish fulfilment.

But it does seem as if took time for Hollywood in particular to catch-up with Highsmith, ironically at the point at which some of the attitudes she espoused would prove most contentious.

The other question, of course, is this: for those of us who DO enjoy our stories with a little ambiguity of purpose, a smidge of darkness around the edges... why?

I'm going to go out on a limb and say I truly believe that no one attending the course is likely to get themselves into TOO sticky a moral morass (and my apologies if I'm underestimating you), yet we get something both intellectually and emotionally from the experience of walking in muddier shoes.

I don't think that's a bad thing. Indeed, I think it may be truly essential to a full understanding of the human experience. Which is why, for all I cringe mightily at Patricia Highsmith's more hateful flaws, I think her work is an object lesson in exploring ALL of what makes us human, good and bad.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Ripliad.

Segue...

FILMS WEEK THREE

Loving Highsmith (2022) – Dir. Eva Vitija

The Cry of the Owl

Le Cri Du Hibou (1987) – Dir. Claude Chabrol

Der Schrei der Eule (1987) – Dir. Tom Toelle

The Cry of the Owl (2009) – Dir. Jamie Thraves

The Two Faces of January

Die zwei Gesichter des Januar (1986) – Dir. Wolfgang Storch

The Two Faces of January (2014) – Dir. Hossein Amini