

# PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ON SCREEN



**Week Five**

**'The Ripliad, Part Two'**

## Welcome to *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*

### Week Five

Watching *Purple Noon* (1960) and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999), starring Alain Delon and Matt Damon respectively, one could easily begin to think of one of Tom Ripley's primary characteristics being a certain type of traditionally handsome young gentleman, a touch awkward perhaps but undeniably pretty (especially once he takes his glasses off in the manner of perfectly-attractive-in-specs-actually librarians in a thousand sexist films).

But Ripley, at least the Ripley from the books, is attractive in a less obvious way. Which is not to say that Highsmith's Ripley couldn't be handsome – who knows precisely how the author picture him – but physiognomy is certainly not the entirety of the occasion.

It's charm. Lethal, at times, charm.

There's something about Ripley that keeps us hooked, that keeps us rooting for him, even when he commits crimes or lets his sociopathic tendencies out for a wander.

Of course, what charms us is subjective.

Perhaps it is the classical features of M. Delon. Perhaps it is the boyish enthusiasm of Mr Damon. Each bring something very different to their Ripleys without ever NOT being Ripley. And then we have Andrew Scott, playing an older Ripley, one in whom we see more immediate evidence of the hard scrabble nature of his existence pre the events of the first book.

Andrew Scott is certainly not an unattractive man. Or priest, for that matter.

But then we have Dennis Hopper, John Malkovich, Barry Pepper. All extremely different in look – all certainly with their own fan clubs, such is the rich tapestry of taste – and all capable of charm, demented or otherwise.

And yet they are all Ripley. In their own ways, they take the central tenets of the character – the search for identity, the insecurity, the insistence on 'bettering' themselves even if it means 'battering' others.

Now, your preference may vary. Like most readers, we too have a version of the character that lives in our heads.

Our Ripley may never show up on screen. We are forced to make do with an approximation. Some existing, actual human actor that we consider as close as possible without actually crawling inside our heads.

But, in the end, it's the malleability and the specificity of Ripley that makes them an enduring character. He is, in some ways, unknowable. And in others, the darkest, most selfish side of our selves.

Love live Tom Ripley, so say we all. Just not next door to us.

## FILMS WEEK FIVE

Loving Highsmith (2022) – Dir. Eva Vitija

### *Ripley's Game*

The American Friend (1977) – Dir. Wim Wenders  
*Dennis Hopper* as Tom Ripley

(With elements of *Ripley Under Ground*)

Ripley's Game (2002) – Dir. Liliana Cavani  
*John Malkovich* as Tom Ripley

Ripley's Game (2009) (Radio 4)  
*Ian Hart* as Tom Ripley

### *The Boy Who Followed Ripley*

The Boy Who Followed Ripley (Radio 4)  
*Ian Hart* as Tom Ripley

### *Ripley Under Water*

Ripley Under Water (Radio 4)  
*Ian Hart* as Tom Ripley