

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ON SCREEN



Week Six

'Four Germans and an Englishman

Welcome to *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*

Week Six

We've talked a lot – of necessity – about the seeming fascination of European writers and directors when it comes to adapting our American author, Ms. Highsmith. And in this week, it really came to the fore, with four of the five adaptations (of the later novels) we examined being from German creative teams and the other a New York story transplanted to London.

So why, until the 21st Century have Patricia Highsmith's stories of her home country more often been lifted and flown (much like their creator) to Europe? Even her first American success was directed by an Englishman in the (iconic) shape of Alfred Hitchcock.

Now, I believe the American national character (so far as such things exist) contains all the nuance, moral complexity and roiling emotional undercurrents as any of their European counterparts.

However, I think – with notable exceptions – that American *film*, at least in the mainstream often eschewed moral complexity in favour of more clear cut good guys and bad guys, often in colour-coded hats.

Many of Patricia Highsmith's characters – including their protagonists – might be easily mistaken for uncomplicated 'bad guys' in a low light. They certainly aren't moral paragons, even the non-murderous ones. Her books examine humanity from an often nihilistic standpoint, asking that eternal question:

'What would I do if I could get away with it?'

Highsmith's books contain endless examples of people 'getting away with it' – whether in the short or long term – and while American audiences are entirely clever enough to deal with that, it hasn't always been the case that the studios in charge of MAKING movies have credited them with that intelligence.

'But what will they think in Iowa?' has been the less than inspirational rallying cry.

European cinema has always favoured – again with notable exceptions – a touch more grey in the mix. And their directors have gravitated towards stories that supply that.

So here was an author with a proven obsession with the dark side of the human animal and the novels and personality to prove it. Perhaps it was inevitable that European cinema would take her to heart.

But then we also witnessed a very English dognapping, so sometimes there is no explanation. One must simply dive in and enjoy.

FILMS WEEK SIX

Loving Highsmith (2022) – Dir. Eva Vitija

The Glass Cell

Die gläserne Zelle (The Glass Cell) (1978) – Dir. Hans Geissendorfer

A Suspension of Mercy

Der Geschichtenerzähler (The Storyteller) (1989) – Dir. Rainer Boldt

The Tremor of Forgery

Trip nach Tunis (1993) – Dir. Peter Goedel

A Dog's Ransom

Armchair Theatre, "A Dog's Ransom" – Dir. Donald McWhinnie

Edith's Diary

Edith's Diary (1983) – Dir. Hans Geissendorfer