

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ON SCREEN



Week Seven

'To Make A Long Story Short'

Welcome to *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*

Week Seven

Patricia Highsmith's novels, understandably, tend to attract the vast majority of both critical attention and, in turn, adaptation. But alongside her full-length works there have been a handful of attempts to tackle Highsmith's shorter fiction.

In truth, you might imagine that more short stories would form the basis for film or TV drama. It's not unheard of, of course. *The Shanshank Redemption*, for instance (future course foreshadowing) is drawn not from one of Stephen King's novels but a shorter novella from the collection *Different Seasons* (also containing the novellas that would become the films *Stand By Me* and *Apt Pupil*. Its fourth novella, *The Breathing Method* has been in development hell for more than a decade). Then there's *All About Eve*, from Mary Orr's *The Wisdom of Eve*. Kubrick's *AI* and *2001* both had roots in short fiction. And several Raymond Carver stories have found their way to screen, notable in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*.

Dependent on the story, expansion often proves easier than the compression necessary to turn a novel into a movie. However, novels often come with at least the beginnings of an inbuilt audience – if the book has been successful – and a useful marketing tool that already exists.

'Now a major motion picture...'

In Patricia Highsmith's case, it was largely the knotty plots and moral ambiguity of the novels that drew in writers and directors, but there are exceptions.

We saw, for instance, *A Mighty Nice Man*, the beautifully shot short film based on the story of the same name, which undoubtedly benefited from the tension of what was left unsaid, in both the story and its adaptation.

And then there was the television adaptation of the theatre performance of the collection of short stories that resides beneath the telling title *Little Tales of Misogyny*.

In both cases, we see some of Patricia Highsmith's own misogyny undone by the nuanced performances of the largely female casts. In work that, at times, undermines women – certainly, at very least, choosing to call out female characters with whose real life analogues Highsmith took issue – the act of bringing them to life demands the extra dimensions that the original author's POV occasionally chooses to ignore.

And, in essence, that's one of the most pervasive outcomes of all of the adaptations we've looked at – by filtering the stories and novels through the spirits of other writers, directors and actors, the authorial view is expanded, and our knowledge of the author transplanted into her stories as part of the telling itself.

We also started looking at the films inspired BY Patricia Highsmith's work, which will continue into our final week.

FILMS WEEK SEVEN

Loving Highsmith (2022) – Dir. Eva Vitija

A Mighty Nice Man (2014) – Dir. Jonathan Dee

Little Tales of Misogyny (1995) – Dir. Pere Sagristà
(Petits contes misògins)

Gone Girl (2014) – Dir. David Fincher

The Girl on the Train (2016) - Dir. Tate Taylor

A Simple Favour (2018) – Dir. Paul Feig

N.B. If you care to check out what else Kenton has been up to...
<https://igg.me/at/swungsongs2/x/2263640#/>