OSCAR VON SETH

QUEER WAITING (TO GET CAUGHT) IN PATRICIA HIGHSMITH'S *THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY*

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Introduction

On the final page of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), the first entry in Patricia Highsmith's *Ripliad* (a series of five crime novels), the protagonist, Tom Ripley, who is a con man and serial killer, has evaded getting caught after a series of violent crimes.[1] But as Tom travels from the Greek mainland to Crete in the end, the text conveys that awaiting capture will most likely characterize his whole life. Paranoid, Tom visualizes "policemen waiting for him, patiently waiting with folded arms" and he wonders if he is "going to see policemen waiting for him on every pier that he ever approached".[2]

This article touches on Tom's villainous and violent characteristics, but there is another phenomenon at its center.[3] I am interested in how *waiting* figures in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, because Fiona Peters suggests in her insightful study about Highsmith's authorship that although most of Highsmith's characters exist in so-called "waiting rooms" – places beneath the surface of the texts where they "find themselves suspended from life and thus unable to engage in meaningful actions or projects" – Tom does *not* exist in such a waiting room.[4] "While other protagonists *wait*", Peters writes, "Tom Ripley *watches* and is *watched*".[5] I do not disagree with the impression that Tom is an observer (since he is a criminal he is always "on the watch") but as I see it, Tom experiences, throughout the *Ripliad*, a profound sense of waiting to get caught for his crimes, a form of waiting that is entwined with expressions of queerness (especially so in the first novel). Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine how waiting is rendered in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, what Tom waits for,

and how waiting affects him. Also, I mean to concretize how waiting and queerness intersect in Highsmith's text and ponder if Tom's antagonistic traits are enhanced because he is forced to endure waiting.

Theoretically, the concept of *queer waiting* influences my reading. Queer waiting "is a form of waiting that is entwined with what makes people queer, like gender nonconformity, norm-challenging sexualities, and forms of kinship that challenge heteronormative relationality".[6] As I have suggested elsewhere, although waiting is a universal human activity and an inescapable feature of life, queer people experience waiting in unique ways.[7] Throughout this article, I demonstrate that Tom's experiences of waiting are closely interwoven with his queer sexuality. I approach *The Talented Mr. Ripley* through a close reading in which a specific element – waiting – is traced, identified, and analyzed in conjunction with the text's expressions of queerness. The emphasis on queerness makes my methodology related to the traditions of *queer reading* and *queer surface reading*. Following the birth of queer theory in the early 1990s, queer readings became interpretive practices in which scholars exposed the hegemony of heterosexuality in literary history by emphasizing latent queer aspects in texts. In contrast, queer surface readings (which became more common in the 2010s) emphasize clearly visible features in texts, not "between the lines" but on the surface.[8]

In the following, I acknowledge expressions of queerness both on the surface of Highsmith's text (i.e., in plain sight) as well as signs that indicate that Tom is conflicted about his sexuality. I should note, though, that in previous scholarship (some of which I am in dialogue with below), Tom's sexuality – if he is meant to be understood as a queer character – is a contested topic.

Summary and previous research

The Talented Mr. Ripley has an intricate narrative that should be summarized here for clarity. In the opening of the novel, Tom lives in New York where he makes a living through various financial scams. He is approached by the wealthy Herbert Greenleaf who offers Tom the opportunity to travel to Italy in order to persuade his son, Dickie, who has been living there for two years, to return to the United

States. Mr. Greenleaf is under the impression that Tom is a good friend of Dickie's. Eager to make some well-needed money, as well as to evade the New York police (Tom fears they are on his trail because of the financial scams), Tom accepts the offer and leaves for Europe. When Tom arrives in Italy, he seeks out Dickie, who spends time with Marge Sherwood, another expatriate with whom he appears to be romantically involved. Tom and Dickie become friends, but for Tom, their bond signifies more than it does for Dickie. Tom starts to believe that he and Dickie will form a life together, living off Dickie's trust fund. In time, Dickie becomes unsettled by having Tom around and Tom suspects he will drop him as a friend. On a boat trip in San Remo, out on the ocean, Tom kills Dickie, disposes of the body and then assumes Dickie's identity. The two men are similar enough for Tom to be able to use Dickie's passport. Tom tries to convince Marge that Dickie has lost interest in her, but throughout the story, she is suspicious of Tom's behavior. A friend of Dickie's called Freddie Miles is equally suspicious, so Tom ends up murdering him too. Cunningly, Tom manages to evade capture by the Italian police by impersonating Dickie, but finally, he is forced to return to his own identity. He manages to make people believe that Dickie is Freddie's murderer and that the guilt over killing him has made Dickie kill himself. Despite Marge's suspicions, Mr. Greenleaf still believes that Tom is a good friend of Dickie's and transfers Dickie's trust fund to him. All is well, it seems, but even though Tom evades capture in the end, he knows he will spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder.

Throughout her career, Patricia Highsmith examined the darkest aspects of humankind. With her Ripley character, Highsmith's ambition was to examine whether it was possible to elicit empathy with a villain. She has said that through Tom she wanted to depict "the unequivocal triumph of evil over good, [to rejoice] in it [and] make my readers rejoice in it, too".[9] Previous research on *The Talented Mr. Ripley* includes studies that focus on how readers identify with or feel empathy for Tom, despite his villainous characteristics;[10] psychoanalytic readings;[11] and interpretations in which Tom's sexuality, or lack thereof, is emphasized.[12] In research after 1999, comparisons between Anthony Minghella's critically acclaimed film adaptation (starring Matt Damon, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and Highsmith's

novel are common.[13] In my analysis, I make some references to that film as well. Scholars generally conclude that Minghella's film emphasizes a latent homosexuality in Tom, whereas Highsmith's novel is less obvious on that point. In Edward A. Shannon's assessment, sexuality is subtext in the novel, whereas the film version goes great lengths to forefront Tom's sexual ambiguity: "The film suggests that Tom Ripley's impetuous murderous rage is linked to society's demand that he [suppresses] his homosexual desire."[14]

In addition, Highsmith herself expressed ambivalence about Tom's sexual orientation. As noted by Fiona Peters, Highsmith claimed, on the one hand, that there is no basis at all for labeling Tom homosexual, noting his lack of a sex life throughout the *Ripliad* (despite being married to a woman at the start of the second book). On the other hand, in an unpublished interview, Highsmith admitted complexities in Tom's sexual orientation that, in my view, can be seen as emphasizing queerness in him. Answering if Tom is more homosexual or asexual, Highsmith stated: "Asexual, although he is the type to be attracted to boys or men but not actually do anything about it physically. I definitely dislike to go into those sex things, and for my purposes I prefer it to be ambiguous because Ripley is not even honest with himself along those lines."[15]

It should be noted here that the temporal setting of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (both when it was written and when the story takes place) likely affects how queerness occurs in it. In the conservative 1950s when Highsmith wrote the novel, portraying Tom as anything other than sexually ambiguous was difficult. Still, the ambiguity acknowledged by the author signifies two things: Tom is conflicted about his sexuality and all interpretations are valid. Henceforth, I operate from the assumption that regardless of whether or not Tom should be read as homosexual, he is conflicted enough about his desire for Dickie to be regarded a queer character.[16] In short, Tom's desire for Dickie challenges normative conceptions of relationality and sexuality in the time when the story takes place and that makes him queer. So too do his experiences of waiting, as we will see momentarily.

Waiting "for" and waiting "upon"

The concept of queer waiting that I am influenced by here draws on scholarship in the field of *queer temporalities* (e.g., José Esteban Muñoz's work, more on that later) as well as Martin Heidegger's philosophies of time and temporality. Under this heading, I examine Tom's waiting by drawing on the latter's thoughts on *releasement*, which refers to a state of calm composure and the ability to "let things be".

Releasement is related to two distinct forms of waiting: "Heidegger makes a distinction between waiting 'for' and waiting 'upon.' Waiting for something specific (like your turn in line at the grocery store) is a different sort of waiting than to wait upon something, an existential form of waiting without a fixed outcome."[17] Whenever I refer to these Heideggerian forms of waiting, they are, for the purpose of clarity, referred to with quotation marks. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom's feelings for Dickie are enhanced because he constantly waits "for" his attention (something tangible). As we shall see, it is Tom's fervent waiting that makes his queerness recognizable. After meeting Dickie on the beach in Mongibello, Tom is immediately overwhelmed by an intense longing to be alone with him. He must, however, wait "for" that exclusivity because of Marge. She is usually around, interrupting them, or invited to join them by Dickie: "Marge's presence kept Tom from talking about anything he would have liked to talk about."[18] When Tom finally gets to be alone with Dickie during a trip to Naples, they are interrupted by Freddie Miles whose company Dickie enjoys but who is an even worse nuisance than Marge. Oozing with disgust, "Tom turned away from [Freddie], waiting for Dickie to finish his conversation".[19] Over time it becomes apparent to Tom that possessing Dickie all to himself will not happen.

Although it occurs in different forms, waiting characterizes the entire novel. When the story begins, Tom exists in a state of waiting "upon" almost anything to happen (an existential sort of waiting). Tom is bored, lives from week to week, and has failed to make a career as an actor. He is killing time while awaiting something interesting to come his way. Until Mr. Greenleaf offers Tom the opportunity to go and bring Dickie home, he is unaware of exactly what he

wants to pursue. While Tom's opportunistic tendencies and cunning nature are accentuated when he accepts the offer, an equally noticeable reason for him taking the job is that he "wanted Mr. Greenleaf to approve of him".[20] Since Tom's parents died when he was young, he has been waiting his entire life to be seen by a parental figure, and Dickie's father comes to fill that void.

Another form of waiting can be identified when Tom leaves for Italy. On the ship crossing the Atlantic, waiting occurs as intertwined with anticipation (a common intertwinement throughout the text). Tom is "starting a new life" and in preparation for all the great things he anticipates will happen, he starts to "play a role … that of a serious young man with a serious job ahead of him".[21] As we can see, roleplaying is an activity that Tom is familiar with long before he assumes Dickie's identity. The segment on the ship emphasizes Tom's potential to fully commit to a performance. He cuts ties with his past, primarily those with his aunt Dottie. Tom despises his aunt, who raised him after his parents died, because she bullied him for his queerly connoted features and called him a "sissy".[22] The references to Tom's troubled childhood shed light on yet another form of waiting. From the age of eight, Tom has waited "for" the right moment to escape: "He had run away at seventeen and had been brought back, and he had done it again at twenty and succeeded."[23] Regardless of whether or not Tom waits "for" or "upon", waiting is an inherent characteristic in his life and an experience he often confronts with impatience. Essentially, he wants to move past it.

In contrast to Tom, Dickie does not seem ever to wait "for" anything. Instead, he is mostly content and entertained by everything that happens and everyone he meets – at least for a while – thus embodying a sort of happy-go-lucky attitude. In essence, Dickie comes across as impulsive, a characteristic that is less prevalent in Tom who is much more strategic. Whereas Tom is waiting "for" Dickie in various ways (e.g., "for" Dickie to finish conversations with others, and "for" him to desire Tom in return), Dickie appears to only be waiting "upon" the next best thing. Tom is lucky to become that next best thing for a while after the Naples trip. He is invited to move into Dickie's house, and they spend their days on Dickie's sailboat. Simultaneously, Marge is annoyed with them both (although

particularly with Tom). Her jealousy suggests that she and Dickie are romantically involved, even though the novel, in contrast to Minghella's film, offers no clarification that they are a couple. Interestingly, because of Dickie's non-sexual relationship with Marge in the novel, Highsmith's original has been seen as more sexually subversive than the film, and the lack of an outspoken romance between Dickie and Marge in the novel makes it possible to read Dickie as much more sexually ambiguous than he is portrayed in the film.[24] However, in my view, Dickie does not come across as especially queerly connoted in Highsmith's text. Rather, he seems to be a straight man who gets aroused by attention from another man. In that regard, his nickname is meaningful. Although Dick, in North American English, is short for Richard, Dickie's nickname also suggests that he is a dick of sorts, that is, a douchebag. Although he appears to be a happy-go-lucky type of person, he does, in fact, possess a temperamental side: "Tom was filled with anticipation, but Dickie was in one of his preoccupied moods and refused to be enthusiastic about anything."[25] Also, regarding Dickie's name, the reference to dick within it (male genitalia) can be understood within a framework of homoeroticism, essentially that Tom desires Dickie sexually. In fact, Tom desperately wants "to make Dickie like him" (on the surface of the text), which is what he desires "more than anything else in the world".[26]

Before Dickie is murdered, one of the many examples of Tom waiting in vain "for" Dickie's attention is all the plans Dickie makes with Tom, like "cruising around the Greek island this winter"[27] (*cruising* being a conspicuous term here) as well as travelling to Capri, Majorca, and going skiing in Cortina, only to repeatedly postpone those plans or forgetting about them altogether. Tom, however, continues to wait and it is impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that Dickie is all talk and has no intention of going through with the plans. Tom does not realize that Dickie is using him as a distraction during a hiccup in the relationship with Marge, who remains his top priority, even though he claims to not be in love with her: "'I think I'll go up and see Marge,' Dickie said. 'I won't be long, but there's no use in your waiting."[28] In no uncertain terms, Dickie conveys that no matter how long Tom waits "for" him to reciprocate his love there is no use in doing so. Dickie does not, nor will he ever, prioritize Tom.

Even after the murder has taken place, remembering Dickie's treatment of Tom makes me, as a reader, empathize with him. In Juliette Bourget's assessment, readers' experiences of empathy with Tom prompts them to perceive his behavior (murder and the like) as sensible, rational, and justified, an assessment that is mirrored by Eric Targan who notes that Highsmith "subtly seduces the reader" into siding with an amoral villain.[29] Moreover, my empathy with Tom stems from his nervousness about being outed as sexually different, a fear that manifests on the surface of text in the shape of internalized homophobia. Tom reassures Dickie: "I'm not queer … I don't want anybody thinking that I am."[30] His homophobic perceptions are strengthened by Dickie's repeated rejections, making Tom feel like a "failure".[31] Tom feeling like a failure can be seen as an embodiment of what Jack Halberstam calls "the queer art of failure". Failing, Halberstam notes, is not only a common characteristic in the lives of queer people, but also "something queers do and have always done exceptionally well".[32] Ultimately, Tom failing to achieve the one thing he desires most – a romantic relationship with Dickie – heightens queer connotations in him.

Moreover, because Tom feels like a failure, he tries to convince himself that there is nothing wrong with him (nor with his desire for Dickie), but he gets ever more conflicted about why he craves Dickie's attention. It has been noted by Chris Straayer that although Tom "resolutely resists and denies" his sexual difference, his goal (however unconscious it may be) is to make Dickie leave Marge and form "an exclusively male homosociality" with him.[33] Therefore, when Tom starts to comprehend that he will never have Dickie all to himself – no matter how long he waits – he starts considering killing him instead. While Tom is antagonistic even before the murder – he is cunning, dubious, and scheming (trying to break up the relationship between Dickie and Marge) – his most forceful iteration of antagonism manifests during the trip to San Remo.

The premeditation of Dickie's murder is one of the major differences between Highsmith's novel and Minghella's film. Whereas the novel portrays the murder as calculated – "He wanted to kill Dickie. It was not the first time he had thought of it"[34] – the film depicts it as a crime of passion, a violent response when Tom finds out that Dickie

does not desire him in return. It has been argued that in the novel, Tom's plan to kill Dickie has less to do with wanting to punish him for not reciprocating his romantic feelings and more to do with a desire to *become* him.[35] In my perception, that interpretation does not acknowledge the complexity in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Sure, Tom wants to assume Dickie's identity with the purpose of claiming his money and possessions, but the build-up to it (i.e., what determines Tom's motive) can be seen as shaped by his feelings for Dickie and his experiences of waiting.

After having waited for so long, Tom is immensely happy once he assumes Dickie's identity. There is an almost euphoric dimension to the pleasure he derives from it: "Every moment to Tom was a pleasure … It was impossible ever to be lonely or bored, he thought, so long as he was Dickie Greenleaf."[36] It is important to underscore that Tom is not meant to be understood as a schizophrenic character. He may pretend to be Dickie with utter conviction, but he is always aware that he has not turned into him in any tangible sense, whereby being Dickie means performing a role as well as being *with* Dickie in a way. Tom is fulfilled after assuming Dickie's identity, which against the backdrop of his intense waiting makes the identity theft comparable to commencing, in a psychosexual way, a romance with a dead man.

As we have seen hitherto, Tom's antagonistic traits are clearly affected by the forms of waiting he experiences (both "for" and "upon"). It is because Dickie strings Tom along – because he keeps him in suspense – that Tom's antagonism is activated violently. Although assuming Dickie's identity is described as a "clean slate",[37] it simultaneously brings the most prominent form of waiting in the novel to the fore, that is, Tom's waiting to get caught.

Waiting to get caught

Let us dwell for a moment on the fact that queer sexualities have historically been associated with criminal behavior, something of which *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is an apt example. In the 1950s when Highsmith wrote the novel, the United States was under the influence of McCarthyism, that is, an aggressive hunt for communist sympa-

thizers within the U.S. government that also included the persecution of suspected homosexuals. During this time, in conscious attempts to discredit "undesirables", investigators specifically linked left-wing political views with sexual deviance. As Byrne Fone notes: "Though these accusations were often simply fabricated … the notion that the homosexual was a political menace had been added to all the other imputations of social undesirability."[38] Throughout *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom is in a state of perpetual paranoia. In essence, he is waiting to get caught, which, against the backdrop of the historical context of McCarthyism, can be seen as entangled with his fear of being outed.

Waiting to get caught is enhanced after Dickie's murder, but it permeates the entire story. In the first sentence of the novel, we encounter Tom on the run. He glances behind him, sees a man following him, and walks faster: "There was no doubt the man was after him."[39] Throughout the story Tom anticipates being arrested (in Heideggerian terms he is waiting "for" capture), but as we saw under the previous heading, waiting occurs in other forms as well and they often intersect with expressions of queerness. Beyond the examples provided above, the paranoia experienced by Tom in the opening is conflated with the notion that the man who is chasing him (who turns out to be Dickie's father) might, in fact, be cruising him: "he would rather the man be a pervert than a policeman."[40] Although the quote does not confirm that Tom actively engages in gay cruising, he is clearly aware of how it works.

As we have seen, after arriving in Mongibello, Tom's temporality consists of an intense waiting "for" Dickie's attention. This goal-oriented experience mirrors how Imad Shouery conceptualizes waiting. Waiting, Shouery explains, is a temporality "on the threshold between the past as it was, and the future as expectation, or in the sense of coming to be".[41] That is, waiting is defined by the possibility of what might come *after* – that is, its *outcome* – not how waiting is *experienced*. As Shouery sees it, when one waits, the present moment is conditioned by the absence of that for which one waits. Waiting, in essence, is a threshold between the past and one's expectations for the future. Until Tom becomes Dickie he lives on that threshold (i.e., a place where the future, which lies at the end of waiting, constitutes

a site of potential), but when he assumes Dickie's identity – when that waiting is finally at an end – another form of waiting immediately takes its place.

Waiting to get caught is not oriented toward a pleasurable goal. Rather, it takes the shape of an anticipation that something bad is bound to happen. As mentioned, Tom's paranoia is entwined with awaiting capture. The novel is characterized by the "feeling that he was being followed".[42] Sometimes he fears being pursued by police: "Tom expected the police to come knocking on his door at any hour of the day or night."[43] Other times he dreads something less tangible: "He was afraid of nameless, formless things that haunted his brain."[44] Tom's paranoia is fueled by how to get away with the murders. After having beaten Freddie Miles to death with an ashtray, Tom must wait "for" the cover of darkness to dispose of the body without being detected: "He dreaded the five- or six-hour wait until nightfall so much that for a few moments he thought he *couldn't* wait."[45] Tom endures the slow time he spends with Freddie's corpse. When it is time to transport the body from Tom's apartment and dump it at a cemetery, there are instances when people see him – or Tom risks being seen – that infuse the text with tension. The moments of suspense are conveyed with tangible expressions of waiting. When Tom drags Freddie's body down the stairs "he stopped, hearing someone come out of an apartment on the second floor. He waited until the person had gone down the stairs and out the front door."[46] And: "He waited a moment, looking at both ends of the straight, empty road."[47] It is noteworthy that even though Tom is observed by people, he is not caught. After managing to bring Freddie's body downstairs, Tom carries the corpse to his car, with Freddie's limp arm over his shoulder, and pretends that he is aiding a drunk friend. The presence of onlookers heightens the tension and the fact that they allow Tom to get away shows that the novel's setting (the mid-1950s) affects how waiting is rendered. Tom's waiting to get caught is a drawn-out experience that contrasts with how criminals await capture nowadays (because of CCTV cameras, facial recognition, and more effective police work).

Furthermore, when carrying Freddie's body, Tom performs the task at hand with pragmatism, scarcely affected by how morbid the situation is. Generally, when Tom is in the deed itself (murder

or other crimes), he is methodical, unemotional, and can be said to possess releasement in the sense that he looks past his paranoia (i.e., letting it be in an "out of sight out of mind" way). It is afterwards, when he waits to get caught, that paranoia sets in. Paranoia is depicted as manageable when Tom is in control (which he mostly is), but when he loses control, which occurs a few times in the novel, he gets physically overwhelmed by the dread of exposure. Tom's physical reactions when anticipating getting caught contradict interpretations that suggest detachment and a complete lack of conscience on his part. Anthony Channel Hilfer writes that Tom is "able to be anyone or anything only by way of being detached from the acts and identities he performs".[48] Even though Tom can be seen as detached (he feels little if any guilt over the crimes he commits), he must, as I see it, in some way grasp the seriousness of his wrongdoings since he is occasionally overcome with intense anxiety.

Tom's anxiety is touched upon in Fiona Peters's study too, in which it is suggested that many of Highsmith's characters exist in "waiting rooms" wherein they are "suspended from life". Peters notes that the waiting room as a concept in Highsmith's work "implies that at some point the characters must vacate their chosen place (of safety, torment, or whatever it might be)" which means, she continues, "that their particular waiting mode is not one of anticipation, but resignation".[49] As mentioned in the introduction, Peters does not see Tom Ripley as a character who waits. Rather, she notes, Tom is a watcher. As we have seen hitherto though, my interpretation contradicts that argument. Tom's "waiting mode" (to borrow Peters's term) breaks with her claim in an additional way. Waiting to get caught, for Tom, is not only a state of resignation or mere torment. Although anticipating getting caught is agonizing, it is also satisfying because it means that one has not been caught *yet*. In Tom's case this means more time pretending to be and being *with* Dickie. Still, during Tom's impersonation, he is always aware that he subjects himself to the risk of facing someone who knows the real Dickie – Tom expects as much, not least because he is believed to be the only friend of Dickie's who knows his whereabouts – and thus, his "waiting mode" involves an active management of the threat of exposure. For example, Tom is pursued by Marge with never-ending inquiries about where Dickie is, which,

it should be noted, fosters impatience rather than releasement. For instance, when he is interrogated about Freddie's death (whose body is found), impatience is a noticeable factor: "Tom recrossed his legs *impatiently*."[50]

Both roles performed by Tom in the novel (himself and Dickie) experience the temporality of waiting, albeit differently. When Tom is himself, he awaits capture, or to be exposed in various ways (as a liar, as a fraud, as sexually different), which provokes paranoia, anxiety, and impatience. When Tom is Dickie, he appears less bothered by waiting. As Dickie, Tom perceives waiting as more of a nuisance which is an effect of him being more at ease with himself: "He ran his fingers through his hair, as Dickie sometimes did when he was irritated. He felt better, concentrating on being Dickie Greenleaf."[51] Waiting to get caught, for Tom, is more manageable when he is Dickie because then Tom's fundamental waiting to be close to the man he desires is over. In those instances, Tom's contentment makes him able to deal with waiting because being Dickie also signifies having gotten away with the crimes. Thus, when he must go back to being Tom to evade capture, he is frustrated. He "hated becoming Thomas Ripley again, hated being nobody, hated putting on his old set of habits again".[52] Regardless which role Tom is performing, waiting is a key feature in his acting habits. Tom knows that any sort of impersonation implies the risk of exposure. In anticipation of Mr. Greenleaf and Marge's arrival at his house in Italy (they are coming with questions about Dickie's disappearance), he experiences it intensely: "It was like waiting interminably for a show to begin."[53] Let us recall that Tom's internalized homophobia prompts him to act as if he is straight. So as not to come across as queer, he performs a role. Tom is a villain whose primary goal, rather than hiding that he is a murderer, seems to be to hide his sexual difference.

When Tom leaves Italy in the final chapter of the novel, waiting to get caught still permeates the story. Tom imagines police "waiting on the dock" to seize him when he arrives.[54] I want to turn here to José Esteban Muñoz's queer-temporal thinking, particularly his conceptualization of the horizon as signifying *queer utopia*, because it can be drawn on to emphasize that Tom's waiting to get caught (like other forms of waiting in the novel) is entangled with queerness. Queer

utopia, to Muñoz, is to be understood as a hopeful vision rooted in the belief that queerness is not just an identity but a *horizon,* a way of imagining a future world beyond the limitations of the present. In Muñoz's words, "queerness is always in the horizon".[55] Also – and this is not insignificant for queer waiting – queer utopia is something queer people await and dream of in order to cope with discrimination, stigma, and other challenges. When Tom is on the ship, he notices a "black sky, so black that there was no trace of [a] horizon".[56] Tom's acknowledgment of the absence of a horizon is noteworthy because earlier in the novel, there is another reference to it: "He stood at the corner of the terrace, staring out at the vague empty line of the horizon and thinking of nothing, feeling nothing except a faint, dreamlike lostness and aloneness."[57] That early scene involves Dickie arriving with a smile and interrupting Tom's contemplation. It is thus possible to regard representations of horizons (or lack of horizons) in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in the spirit of Muñoz's thinking. The queer utopia Tom longs for is one in which he and Dickie are together. In the end, however, not being able to detect even a "*trace* of a horizon" signifies that although Tom evades capture, freedom comes with a steep price: Dickie is gone and the possibility of being close to him by impersonating him is gone too.

To Tom's surprise, no police await him in Greece. What does await him is a letter from Mr. Greenleaf stating that Dickie's will (a document forged by Tom previously in the story) suggests "that Richard has taken his own life" and that lawyers will be "making over Richard's trust fund and other properties" to Tom.[58] Although the letter is regarded as good news (Tom understands he is in the clear), he is not fully content. He regrets some of his actions: "if he only hadn't misjudged the relationship between Dickie and Marge so stupidly, or had simply waited for them to separate of their own volition, then none of this would have happened, and he *could* have lived with Dickie for the rest of his life."[59] It is the loss of a potential life partner Tom laments. His regret does not involve guilt over having murdered and ruined people's lives, which substantiates that Tom is a character in whom antagonism and queerness merge.

I should note, however, that the link between queerness and violence in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* can and should be problematized. As

Michael Trask has stated, Tom's homosexuality is "stereotypical" and there are troubling implications in Highsmith's "penchant for equating homoerotic and homicidal tendencies" throughout her oeuvre.[60] One can certainly be critical of Highsmith's conflation of Tom's sexuality and his inclination toward violence. Arguably, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* would be an exciting read without its queer themes. In my view, Tom's inner conflict about his desire for Dickie (to be him or to be *with* him) raises the stakes. The juxtaposition of waiting to get caught and waiting to be outed as sexually different makes the novel more suspenseful. All in all, the entwinement of queerness and antagonism that Tom embodies demonstrates that one cannot examine one without recognizing the other. Tom, as I see it, is clearly both antagonistic and queer.

As I have theorized elsewhere, waiting, for queer people, can be "'a way of life' that is forced upon us by heteronormativity".[61] Nevertheless, for Tom, the anticipation involved in waiting (especially in the first half of the novel) is not only tedious and fosters impatience, but it is also imbued with hopefulness and excitement because maybe, just maybe, Dickie might come around and reciprocate Tom's feelings. Additionally, after Dickie's murder, awaiting getting caught involves a kind of pleasurable anticipation because Tom gets to impersonate Dickie: "It occurred to him that his anticipation was more pleasant to him than his experiencing."[62] It is important to note that although Tom can sometimes pretend to be Dickie and to be *with* him at the same time, that is only possible in solitude.[63] In some instances, people may believe that he really is Dickie Greenleaf, but as long as Marge is around and tries to make contact, Tom cannot truly *become* him. In that regard, waiting to get caught constitutes a prison of sorts even though Tom evades capture, because it fortifies his loneliness: "He would have to keep a distance from people, always."[64] Also, let us recall the quote I began this article with. On the final page of the novel (when Tom travels onward from the Greek mainland to Crete), it is conveyed that awaiting capture is to characterize his whole life. Tom visualizes "policemen waiting for him, patiently waiting with folded arms". As we can see, for Tom Ripley waiting is a never-ending story.

Conclusion: Deidealizing Tom Ripley

This article has emphasized that Tom Ripley embodies a cluster of antagonism, queerness, and waiting. That cluster prompts two apt takeaways from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The first: Because Tom is unable to acknowledge the queer parts of himself, he experiences intense shame and self-disgust, and that is why he acts out against others, becoming a serial killer. The second, which contradicts the first, is the more convincing one: Tom is unable to live authentically as queer, but that is not the foundation for his antagonism. First and foremost, Tom is a villain (as Highsmith intended), but he is a villain who happens to embody a suppressed queer sexuality. Although Tom's sexuality can be seen as related to his crimes (like killing Dickie because he cannot have him to himself), his queerness is much less prevalent in the subsequent four novels in the *Ripliad* (despite dressing up in drag in the fourth one). It is thus possible to argue that in the series as a whole, Tom's queerness does not constitute the basis of his antagonistic behavior. In the first novel though, his queerness constitutes an accelerant to antagonism. Because Dickie keeps Tom in suspense, Tom murders him. Regardless of whether one chooses to interpret Tom's feelings for Dickie as sexual or not, Tom snaps when he realizes that he is waiting in vain.

Desiring Dickie and murdering him too constitutes a contradiction that can be understood via the concept of *deidealization*, which, as Kadji Amin has shown, is a useful tool for scholars who work with historical material in which queer people (or characters) behave in less-than-respectable ways.[65] To Amin, deidealization can help dismantle idealized attachments to historical queer figures. Simultaneously, the concept emphasizes that there are important lessons to be learned from queer history's undesirable objects (i.e., queers who behave heinously and whose actions are hard to defend). Amin underlines the importance of situating historical queer figures in their temporal and cultural contexts which means resisting the temptation to project current queer values onto the past. A character like Tom Ripley – a serial killer and closeted queer man suffering from internalized homophobia (as I interpret him) – can easily be seen as not representing modern queer-political ideals particularly well. Rather,

he constitutes a troubling and "inconvenient" aspect of queer literary history. Amin emphasizes that "the alternative and the nonnormative – those terms most valued within Queer Studies – *need not be politically desirable or affectively pleasurable*; at times they might be experienced as barely tolerable, or more likely, as nauseating in the ways in which they twist the valued terms of the present to an unrecognizable state".[66] Although the murder of Dickie is an inexcusable act, Tom's drawn-out waiting "for" his attention (and Dickie behaving like a dick) certainly makes it possible to empathize with Tom. It is important to remember that queer objects of study need not be "respectable" to be worth engaging with. Although Victoria Hesford notes that Highsmith's novels about Tom Ripley constitute counter-fantasies "to the politically radical ambitions of both gay liberation and queer studies",[67] we can, through deidealization, learn to accept the entwinement of queerness and antagonism that Tom embodies, as well as acknowledge the truly complex features of this undesirable object from queer literary history.

Conclusively, Tom Ripley reminds us that literary queer representation has become less ambiguous in our time than it was in the mid-1950s. Also, even though he does not behave according to respectable standards of contemporary queer politics, he constitutes, as a queer villain, a counterpoint that is valuable for Queer Studies. Not only because his complexities and contradictions are interesting in and of themselves, but also because an exclusively "positive" representation of queer people in media (e.g., saint-like portrayals) involves an overwhelming risk of unreasonable standards being set for queers in real life.

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Notes

1 The five novels that make up the *Ripliad* are: *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), *Ripley Under Ground* (1970), *Ripley's Game* (1974), *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (1980), and *Ripley Under Water* (1991).

2 Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley / Ripley Under Ground / Ripley's Game* (New York: Random House, [1955, 1970, 1974] 1999), 290.

3 I want to clarify upfront that although *The Talented Mr. Ripley* can be seen as a queer-themed novel in which death is a key theme, it does not involve the "bury your gays" trope that has been a staple in literary history (that is, queers being "killed off" by means of narrative renditions of suicide and murder). Highsmith's novel may involve death, but death is never a punishment for *being* queer, rather the opposite. As this article demonstrates, Tom murders Dickie because he does *not* reciprocate his desire (i.e., because Dickie is not queer).

4 Fiona Peters, *Anxiety and Evil in the Writings of Patricia Highsmith* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 37.

5 Peters, *Anxiety*, 148 (emphasis in original).

6 Oscar von Seth, "Queer Waiting in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*", *Lambda Nordica* (2025, online first), 4–5, https://doi.org/10.34041/ln.v.1006.

7 See von Seth, "Queer Waiting", 1–24; and Oscar von Seth, "A Bad Gay Waiting for Vengeance: Ellie in *The Last of Us Part II*", *REDEN. Revista Española De Estudios Norteamericanos* vol. 6 (2025: 2), 23–38, https://doi.org/10.37536/reden.2025.6.2724.

8 See e.g., Jenny Björklund, Ann-Sofie Lönngren, "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Queer Reading Strategies, Swedish Literature, and Historical (In)visibility", *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 92 (2020: 2), 196–228, https://doi.org/10.3368/sca.92.2.0196.

9 Patricia Highsmith, *Patricia Highsmith: Her Diaries and Notebooks, 1941–1995*, Anna von Planta ed. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021), 633.

10 See e.g., Lech Zdunkiewicz, "Aligning with Sociopaths: Character Engagement Strategies in Highsmith's and Minghella's Talented Mr. Ripleys", *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture* (2021: 11), 119–136, https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-2931.11.09; and Juliette Bourget, "From Witness to Accomplice: The Manipulation of Readers' Empathy Through Consciousness Representation in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley*", *Journal of Literary Semantics* vol. 52 (2023: 2), 145–161, https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2023-2010.

11 See e.g., Anthony Channell Hilfer, "'Not Really Such a Monster': Highsmith's Ripley as Thriller Protagonist and Protean man", *Midwest Quarterly Journal of Contemporary Thought* vol. 25 (1984: 4), 361–374.

12 See e.g., Chris Straayer, "The Talented Poststructuralist: Heteromasculinity, Gay Artifice, and Class Passing", in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, Peter Lehman ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 115–132; George Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Michael Trask, "Patricia Highsmith's Method", *American Literary History* vol. 22 (2010: 3), 584–614, https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajq038; and David Greven, "Queer Ripley: Minghella, Highsmith, and the Antisocial", in *Patricia Highsmith on Screen*, Wieland Schwanebeck, Douglas McFarland eds. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96050-0_7.

13 There are three notable cinematic renditions of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. In the first, *Plein soleil* (*Purple Noon*, René Clément, 1960), Alain Delon plays Tom; the second is Anthony Minghella's Academy Award-nominated *The Talented Mr. Ripley* from 1999; and the third and most recent version is the TV series *Ripley* (Steven Zaillian, 2024), starring Andrew Scott as Tom.
14 Edward A. Shannon, "'Where Was the Sex?' Fetishism and Dirty Minds in Patricia Highsmith's 'The Talented Mr. Ripley'", *Modern Language Studies* vol. 34 (2004: 1–2), 19, https://doi.org/10.2307/4150053.
15 Peters, *Anxiety*, 154.
16 Although Tom can be understood as a queer character, Patricia Highsmith – who was a lesbian – is difficult to label a "queer writer", primarily because of her personal prejudices (racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, stereotypical thinking) and due to her lack of engagement with the emancipatory politics of her time. See e.g., Andrew Wilson, *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 299; and Victoria Hesford, "Tom Ripley, Queer Exceptionalism, and The Anxiety of Being Close to Normal", *Angelaki* vol. 23 (2018: 1), 102, https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2018.1435382.
17 von Seth, "Queer Waiting", 6. See also Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, John M. Anderson, E. Hans Freund trans. (New York: Harper & Row, [1959] 1966).
18 Highsmith, *Talented*, 62.
19 Highsmith, *Talented*, 64.
20 Highsmith, *Talented*, 23.
21 Highsmith, *Talented*, 34.
22 Highsmith, *Talented*, 38.
23 Highsmith, *Talented*, 39.
24 See Shannon, "Sex", 18ff.
25 Highsmith, *Talented*, 72.
26 Highsmith, *Talented*, 53.
27 Highsmith, *Talented*, 73.
28 Highsmith, *Talented*, 76.
29 Bourget, "Witness", 147; and Eric Targan, "Identity Theft: The Amoral Vision of Patricia Highsmith", *The Midwest Quarterly* vol. 56 (2015: 4), 317.
30 Highsmith, *Talented*, 80.
31 Highsmith, *Talented*, 89.
32 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.
33 Straayer, "Talented", 117.
34 Highsmith, *Talented*, 100.
35 See Shannon, "Sex".
36 Highsmith, *Talented*, 122.
37 Highsmith, *Talented*, 127.
38 Byrne Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 390.
39 Highsmith, *Talented*, 3.
40 Highsmith, *Talented*, 4.
41 Imad Shouery, "Phenomenological Analysis of Waiting", *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* vol. 3 (1972: 3), 95, https://doi.org/10.5840/swjphil19723342.
42 Highsmith, *Talented*, 217.

43 Highsmith, *Talented*, 281.
44 Highsmith, *Talented*, 217.
45 Highsmith, *Talented*, 146 (emphasis in original).
46 Highsmith, *Talented*, 148.
47 Highsmith, *Talented*, 151.
48 Hilfer, "Monster", 371.
49 Peters, *Anxiety*, 37.
50 Highsmith, *Talented*, 171 (emphasis added).
51 Highsmith, *Talented*, 172.
52 Highsmith, *Talented*, 192.
53 Highsmith, *Talented*, 219.
54 Highsmith, *Talented*, 285.
55 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 11.
56 Highsmith, *Talented*, 282.
57 Highsmith, *Talented*, 92.
58 Highsmith, *Talented*, 289.
59 Highsmith, *Talented*, 274 (emphasis in original).
60 Trask, "Method", 585.
61 von Seth, "Queer Waiting", 21.
62 Highsmith, *Talented*, 180.
63 Although I draw on notions of *queer antisociality* in my conceptualization of queer waiting (e.g., Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* [Durham: Duke University Press 2004]; see von Seth, "Queer Waiting", 18), Tom should not be labeled antisocial because he longs for companionship.
64 Highsmith, *Talented*, 185f.
65 Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
66 Amin, *Disturbing Attachments*, 31 (emphasis in original).
67 Hesford, "Exceptionalism", 103.