‘Sooner or later most of us get hooked’: the question of insanity in Patricia Highsmith’s *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

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Psychologically convincing representations of pathological states of mind mark Patricia Highsmith’s *Strangers on a Train* from its early stages, as the unlikely killer Guy Haines moves closer to committing a murder, and at the novel’s close, when Guy acknowledges his responsibility for his crime. In spite of this ending—which strongly evokes the redemptive culmination of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*—the moral ambivalence of Highsmith’s *Strangers on a Train* demonstrates that it is considerably more than a moralising reflection on the curative powers of the law and the criminal justice system, or the religious imperative to seek forgiveness for one’s sins. Highsmith’s novels are known for their tacit complicity with amoral killers, and although a degree of guilt and atonement is permitted to the ‘good guy’ Guy, in 1955 Highsmith would move away from such resolutions and introduce her notorious anti-hero, the amoral and perversely likeable serial killer, Tom Ripley. As distinct as these two killers and their crimes are, the characterisation of guilt-wrecked Guy and guiltless, psychologically mysterious, ‘unexplained’ Tom (Peters 149), can be linked to the intellectual and psychological context of the 1930s—when a young Highsmith first accessed popular psychological textbooks and first began writing and plotting tales of deviance and abnormality—through to the 1950s, when these novels were published. This article’s objective is to bring Highsmith’s criminal minds into proper focus, and to achieve greater precision in the use of often carelessly employed terminology relating to mental illness and criminality.

It has become a critical commonplace to describe Highsmith’s characters as psychopathic or insane (French; Lukin 21), but as the psychologist Karl A. Menninger argued in *The Human Mind* (1930), the division drawn between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ is excessively simplistic; according to Menninger, what psychiatrists actually deal with are complex personality types who for a diverse range of reasons have failed to make adjustments to their changing environments. Examination of Menninger’s case studies will inform readings of both novels, while their medical contexts will be examined to determine how the relationship between insanity and

criminality was begin debated in the 1950s, and what impact this may have had on Highsmith's writing.

Strangers on a Train (1950) was Highsmith's first published novel. It delineates the psychological and emotional changes that Guy experiences after a chance meeting with the dissipated Charles Bruno on a long-distance train. Bruno is a pathological drunk, while Guy is a 'regular guy', and when they meet, an explosive situation is created. The term 'situation' has specific meaning in Menninger's work, which will be described later, but here it is sufficient to note that this meeting knocks Guy's life off course. What Bruno suggests to him is that '[a]ny kind of person can murder' (26). Guys resists this, but Bruno's close questioning forces Guy to confront his own fantasies of killing the man who slept with his wife: 'He remembered the sleepless nights, hundreds of them, and the despair of peace unless he avenged himself. Could something have pushed him over the line then?' (26). As Guy will realise, the line is closer than he thinks, and not too clearly marked. The course that Highsmith charts as he crosses—or is pushed over—this line is made all the more strange and unexpected by the emphatic normality of Guy, in contrast to Bruno, a man who wants to murder before he dies purely for the experience (25-26). If Bruno is, as Highsmith herself described him, a 'psychopath' (Highsmith, 'The Book Programme') who repels Guy at first sight, why is Guy drawn into Bruno's carriage and into his fantasy of participating in the reciprocal murders of Bruno's father and Guy's wife? What draws these two seemingly opposed figures together, and how can sense be made out of Guy's change from moral, normal, 'good guy', to a paranoid, guilt-wracked, ruined murderer?

In his biography of Highsmith, Andrew Wilson charts the literary heritage Highsmith draws from in depicting the love-hate relationship between these opposing, mirrored doubles: representatives of reason and unreason, the Dionysian and Apollonian, as well as the inherent contradictions and divisions of selfhood (Wilson 127-129). The thesis of dualistic attraction and repulsion takes into consideration nineteenth century literary and philosophical influences on Highsmith (including Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Poe and Nietszche: see Wilson 158-159; 126-127; 51; 211-214) and convincingly accounts for much of the Guy-Bruno relation (as well as the Tom-Dickie one in *The Talented Mr Ripley*). However, it does not address the contextual specificities that influenced Highsmith's characterisation, and enabled

her to update older literary archetypes to address contemporary innovations and developments in American psychology between 1930 and the 1950s.

Over the following sections, I will discuss the importance of psychoanalysis; Menninger; the 'psychopath'; and the development of criteria by which to diagnose mental illness in *DSM-1*—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—in 1952. As this article concludes, Highsmith's character studies draw from contemporary psychologies in ways that cannot in isolation explain away or account for the mentalities of her killers, but which disrupt the line drawn between normal and abnormal minds by demonstrating the constructed nature of the two categories, and the contiguous relationship between the poles.

Unconscious Motivation

The tendency to problematize classifications of individuals into categories as normal and abnormal can be traced to psychoanalytic practice, notably Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious, which provided a language in which to articulate the non-rational mechanisms of mind. Highsmith appreciated Freud's insights into the relationship between the unconscious and creativity (Wilson 70) and submitted herself to analysis in 1947 (Wilson 147-148). Further than its immediate impact on Highsmith's life, the notion that there were hidden, irrational and possibly deviant aspects of one's own self, which one may neither control nor know, had profound cultural reach beyond orthodox psychoanalysis. Wilson documents Highsmith's readings of André Gide, a French novelist who depicts the inherent irrationality of human behaviour in novels like *The Counterfeiters* (1925)—which impressed Highsmith with its depictions of characters who 'behave irrationally' (Wilson 111)—and *Lafcadio's Adventures* (1914)—a novel in which a character pushes a stranger to their certain death from a moving train on a momentary and unaccountable whim: 'What's the use of wanting me to explain to you what I can't explain to myself?' (Gide 270) he exclaims when asked why he did it. In contrast to the classic formula of detective fiction, which offers the resolution of a mystery and the guarantee that offenders will be caught and punished, Highsmith presents deeply ambivalent and challenging post-Freudian meditations on the nature of guilt and responsibility. Peters, summarising Hilfer's argument concerning Highsmith's debt to philosophical writing, asserts that 'Highsmith's amoral hero can be viewed as one in a long line of

protean selves more at home in the annals of 'high' literature rather than the crime novel' (Peters 6).

However, the classic detective novel was also influenced by psychoanalytic insights into the unconscious. Many British 'golden age' writers experimented with irrational motivations (see Allingham, Sayers and Mitchell) in ways that contradiction detective fiction's perceived insistence on rational motivation. The influence of Freud in many golden age whodunits meant that '[c]riminal motivation, no longer necessarily seen as a purely self-interested expression of "evil", is seen instead as a very mysterious thing, so mysterious that it was not necessarily known even to the criminal themselves' (Walton 177). In *Strangers on a Train*, a great deal of Guy's behavior, and the motivation for it, is mysterious—or at least not fully rationalized: 'Guy contemplated going to the diner, but for some reason sat on' (11). Guy is passive, detached, and often surprised at his own behavior. At their first meeting, Guy speaks and, 'having heard himself, did not know where the words had come from' (26). In the immediate run-up to the murder of Bruno's father, Guy acts like an automaton, moving through the motions of Bruno's plan in a nervous stupor: '[h]e felt he moved on certain definite tracks now, and that he could not have stopped himself or got off of them if he wanted to' (132). Throughout the novel, Guy's inner life is closely and intimately narrated through free-indirect discourse, but hidden aspects of the mind and character of this man reveal themselves at stressful moments: 'He was like Bruno. Hadn't he sensed it time and time again, and like a coward never admitted it? Hadn't he known Bruno was like himself? Or why had he liked Bruno? He loved Bruno' (134). These unconscious insights are surprising to a reader who might have felt they 'knew' Guy well, and they are surprising to Guy himself. However, as his execution of the murder shows, they were of driving influence on his behaviour and motivation.

After Guy has crossed the line, his unconscious drives become part of his waking reality, forcing him into confrontation with aspects of his concealed nature: 'he did it because there had been that measure of perversity within him sufficient to do it … he had done it because of the worm in the wood' (250). There are overlaps here with earlier detective fiction too. Stephen Knight has described how Agatha Christie forces her readers to inhabit the mind and moral universe of a murderous character by having the villain of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) narrate the tale. Sharing close quarters with the killer is akin to experiencing one's own self as

threateningly deviant: the concealed murderous activities of the narrator correspond to the hidden activity of the unconscious, while the master narrative that disguises criminality represents the surface experience of rationality and normality achieved by the repressing Super Ego. What confronts the reader in *Roger Ackroyd* is what Knight refers to as the 'concealed enemy of the self': the reader faces their own anxieties about personal deviance, immorality and irrationality (Knight 113). Likewise, Wilson has noted Highsmith's capacity to trick the reader into sharing close quarters with a morally reprehensible character: he describes how she 'cleverly seduces the reader into identifying with Ripley until by the end our moral responses have been so invaginated, we are actively on the side of the killer, hoping he will escape punishment' (Wilson 6). It is tempting to compare Guy's complicit passivity in getting into the compartment with Bruno to reading a novel like *Roger Ackroyd*, or even *The Talented Mr Ripley*. The reader is surprised by their willingness to share the space of criminals, and are brought disarmingly close to sharing their world view too. As Peters states, Highsmith 'blurs the boundaries between accepted and pathological patterns of behaviour' (Peters 38) in ways that force the reader into confrontation with their own moral lapses and desires.

The 'Psychopath

Karl Menninger's 1930 study, *The Human Mind*, had a formative and lifelong influence on Highsmith, as well as on American psychiatry, as a widely published and standard textbook. Wilson presents a vivid account of Highsmith's experiences reading Menninger's book as a teenager in the early 1930s (40-41), and nearly sixty years later, Highsmith wrote to the elderly Menninger to inform him how 'stimulating' the tales of breakdown and crime where to her young imagination (Highsmith 'Letter to Karl Menninger' qtd. in Wilson 41).

Menninger draws directly from Freudian thought, in particular in his chapter on criminal motivation: 'there *is* a psychic underworld, a nether region, and … *we* are not aware of all that *we* are thinking. … What Freud discovered was a method for learning systematically about these hidden things in people's minds' (263). In spite of the influence of Freud, a great deal of the book outlines a theory of personality in which the psychoanalytic tenets of repression and other such Freudian terms play a complementary, but not leading role.

Highsmith may have been influenced by Menninger's sceptical attitude to those who accused all criminals of insanity. This complaint is apt in the context of twentieth century Anglo-American psychology, which had for the last century sought explanations for criminal behaviour and 'born criminality' in such traits as moral insanity (see Pritchard 12-26), low intelligence (after the development of Binet-Simon intelligence test in 1905), inheritance, moral imbecility (see Tredgold[1]) and feeblemindedness (Menninger 8). The term 'psychopathic personality' had been introduced to psychology in 1888 (Koch), and at Menninger's moment was replacing intellectual defect and inheritance as the most popular explanation of criminality. Menninger sees this very modern tendency as the latest stage in a long history of unhelpful othering: 'Calling people witches or devils or sons of guns or psychopathic personalities doesn't help. To do so doesn't indicate any real understanding of why they are, why they do what they do, or what can be done to help matters' (Menninger 8). The sociologist David McCallum demonstrates a post-structuralist affinity with Menninger's critique of criminal taxonomization in his analysis of discursive relations between mental health and criminality: 'Why has a man done such terrible things?' he asks, 'Because he is a psychopath. How do you know he is a psychopath? Because he has done these terrible things' (McCallum 61). In the 1930s—as today, if we folow McCallum—mental illness was routinely conflated with wickedness, a peculiar balancing act in which those labelled 'psychopaths', and later sociopaths and anti-social personalities, were seen as both mentally ill—limiting their responsibility for any acts they committed—and personally threatening—that is, criminally minded, morally deficient, likely to commit terrible acts, and deserving ostracization, confinement and punishment.

Following the publication of Hervey M. Cleckley's *The Mask of Sanity* (1941), the psychopathic personality emerged as 'a distinct clinical entity, and established its core criteria around antisocial behaviours (in particular, aggressive acts)' (NCCMH 15); other common psychopathic traits defined by Cleckley included rational thinking, manipulativeness, no sense of responsibility, disregard for truth, intelligence, self-centeredness, and a lack of empathy. Cleckley also notes how 'the typical psychopath will seem particularly agreeable and make a distinctly positive impression when he is first encountered. Alert and friendly in his attitude, he is easy

[1] A. F. Tredgold's *Mental Deficiency – Amentia* and later *Text-Book of Mental Deficiency – Amentia* was frequently revised and updated between 1908 and 1952.

to talk with and seems to have a good many genuine interests' (Cleckley). In 1952, the first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders*—the key diagnostic textbook for mental health practitioners—reframed older understandings of psychopathic behaviour to define 'sociopathic personality disturbance.'[2] Sociopaths were believed to lack 'dynamic features of personality such as guilt, anxiety and loyalty' (Rutherford et al, 849), a definition which could support a diagnosis whether or not crimes had been committed. Tom Ripley has frequently and indiscriminatingly been called both a psychopath and sociopath (see French; Lukin 21). There is some justification for this: he is, on first meeting, a pleasant and attractive character, and he experiences at worst a sense of distasteful regret at having committed a murder, rather than any profound feelings of remorse: 'And he hadn't wanted to kill [Freddie] at all. It had been so unnecessary' (126). However, Peters observes that 'while Tom Ripley does not experience guilt, there is nevertheless a layer of anxiety in the Ripley novels' (148). As cool as Tom is when committing his crimes, he suffers from terrifying episodes afterwards. For example, before meeting Dickie's father in Venice: 'He twisted on to his side, his feet drawn up on the sofa. He was sweating and shaking. What was happening to him? What had happened?' (Highsmith 1999, 218). As satisfying as it is to diagnose Tom according to certain symptoms then recognised by psychiatrists, as Peters states, '[t]here is no indication, within the Ripley novels, that Highsmith at any time wants to decode Tom, to investigate how he functions to allow her to keep writing, to treat her favourite hero as a bunch of symptoms' (148). Grey Gowrie has even questioned whether Tom can meaningfully be described as a psychopath:

> He is not amoral (which is how he describes his wife Heloise) because he is aware of his own immorality and harbours a detached interest in the morality and the ethical behaviours of others. But the finger of guilt only lightly brushes his shoulders. It caresses him almost. He is not psychopathic for he is able to imagine the lives and feelings of others. (Gowrie xi)

Gowrie's notion of the psychopath derives, in general terms, from Cleckley's sixteen point definition of the condition, and he foregrounds the defining trait, the psychopath's supposed lack of empathy. What Gowrie describes is not really that: a 'detached interest' in the moral behaviour of others is not the same thing as

[2] Later renamed 'antisocial personality disorder' (Hare).

compassionately responding to those moral behaviours, or identifying with and sharing their emotions. Tom's capacity to imagine the feelings of others is certainly a useful survival technique amongst his many talents. His interest in the emotions of others enables him to compose convincing letters from Dickie to Marge, long after Tom has murdered Dickie (103-104). It also enables him to approximate normal behaviour and present a convincing 'mask of sanity': 'Tom writhed in in deck-chair as he thought of it, but he writhed elegantly, adjusting the crease of his trousers' (35). Tom is certainly an emotional individual, easily wounded and moved to tears (see 30; 83; 86). Like the good method actor—acting was the profession he intended to take up when he first moved to New York (35)—he repurposes his own emotional experiences to form the basis of convincing performances of himself to a world from which he feels distanced and rejected.

Environmental Adjustment

Contemporary understandings of psychopathology and antisocial behaviour are the resource from which Highsmith constructs Tom and Bruno, and from which readers draw in interpreting their behaviour. However, Highsmith's novels are imperfect case studies which test, as much as they conform to, mid-century psychological classifications advanced by Cleckley and *DSM-I*. Menninger case studies present an alternative lens through which to read Highsmith. His intention was to demonstrate that the division between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' mind was reductive and falsely dichotomous. Due to the challenges of life and the difficulty of adjusting to changing circumstances, like a trout swimming against the current and distracted by the fisher's bait, he believed that 'sooner or later … most of us get hooked' (3). Menninger names and defines a range of personality types—including schizoid, neurotic, perverse and cycloid—and outlines the various ways in which these otherwise normal types may fail. Life is, as Menninger outlines it, a series of situations which demand adjustment, and at this the individual may succeed, compromise, or fail. Success may be distinguished by happiness, mental equilibrium, or simply not noticing that anything has taken place. Compromise involves some personal readjustment: one may have to rethink expectations, or alter aspects of one's personality (23-24). Failure is described in most detail, because individual failure results in the kinds of situations that police and psychiatrists deal with: 'They may fail … by a flight which damages themselves—or by an attack which damages

society. Some personalities can't "make" certain situations, and, failing, even at a compromise, they become broken or breakers' (149). A broken person may commit suicide or 'break down' (experience mental illness), a breaker might commit murder or crime, with or without mental collapse.

Menninger's compendium of crime makes compulsive reading. Case studies of different personality types consider the influence of childhood care or abuse, religious beliefs, habits, and education. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the schizoid personality type, as it bears strongest relation to the characterization of Tom Ripley. There are, however, resemblances between other personalities types and Tom, which there is neither space, nor compelling reason, to go into: what I intend the comparison to prove is that Menninger's schema for human adjustment provides a pertinent and historically influential alternative to the classification of criminals as insane because they are criminals, which may well have appealed to Highsmith and influenced her writing.

Of the schizoid personality type—amongst which he groups former US President Woodrow Wilson—Menninger states that it is 'a type characterized by queerness, a queer sort of queerness, and there is nothing else like it in the world' (Menninger 73). A rather unscientific definition though this is, he goes on:

> the common tendency of the members of this group is an inability to get along well with other people. … These people often appear to want very much (or think they do) to mix with the herd. But they never do—successfully, at any rate. They may make gestures, go through the motions, even become extremists in social manoeuvres, but "the pane of glass is always there." They never really make contacts. (Menninger 76)

Menninger uses thes term schizoid because of the origin of the word from the Greek 'to spilt': 'the queerness of these folk represents a break or split in the internal harmony of the personality so that an external disharmony also results and the schizoid person is noticeably out of tune with the rest of the world' (Menninger 77).

The idea of the split, and of the 'pane of glass' has obvious relevance to *The Talented Mr Ripley*, and the label 'queer' haunts Tom. In the early 20th century, the slippery term 'queer' combines mere eccentricity, ill-defined unsavouriness and sexual deviance, as well as connotations of ill health—"feeling a bit queer" (for a further account, see W. Sayers). Menninger could not have missed these insinuations, but accusations of sexual deviance are clearly not his primary denotation here. A

distinction can be made between the queerness of gay culture and 'queerness' as Menninger outlines it, and this distinction can be used to inform a reading of *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

After Dickie finds Tom alone in Dickie's room, dressed in Dickie's clothes, he accuses him of being 'queer', an accusation suggested to Dickie by Marge (70). The reading of Tom as a gay character is compelling in the context of Highsmith's own experiences living as a lesbian during an era of persecution, discrimination, brutality against and the medical pathologization of homosexuals. Homosexuality was, after all, listed under sociopathic personality disturbance in *DSM I* (Lev 40), a fact which adds an important dimension to categorisations of Tom as a psychopath, as well as Highsmith's own note in a cahier of 1942 that she believed her prose was 'psychopathic' (qt. in Wilson 97). In his film of the novel, Anthony Minghella prioritises such reading: to critics, 'the film concentrates on the characters' sexuality' (Shannon 17) producing a 'lethal cocktail of covert queerness and killing' (Ruby). However, in general terms, Tom's 'queerness' alludes to both the suggestion of homosexuality, and the distance from the world that Menninger attributes to schizoid personalities. Whether he is gay or not is a question that Tom has certainly asked himself, but without the sense of shame that preoccupied many in this era of compulsory heterosexuality in the US. He has numerous gay friends in New York, remembers having made efforts to improve friendships with gay friends who had mistook him for a potential lover (71), and recalls conversations in which he joked about his inability to feel desire men or women: 'I'm thinking of giving them *both* up' (71). In a social context of virulent homophobia, Tom is not hurt or shocked by Dickie's accusations: 'Who was making an issue of it anyway?' he asks (71), which could be taken as evidence that Tom is gay, or simply that he is not homophobic. It is worth noting that characters who are homophobic are those who are the most reprehensible, including Tom's psychologically abusive Aunt Dottie (86), Freddie Miles (123), and Dickie himself when he reacts disapprovingly to Tom's admiration for a group of athletes they both assume to be gay (86). While Highsmith's prose is often frustratingly ambiguous at key moments, Tom's thoughts here suggests he believes it is Dickie who is repressing his sexuality in ways that explain his mood swings and lack of desire for Marge: 'Did he have to act so damned aloof and superior all the time? You'd think he'd never seen a pansy! Obvious what was the

matter with Dickie, all right! Why didn't he break down, just for once? What did he have that was so important to lose?' (86).

Although Marge first suggests that Tom is gay, she soon retracts the accusation: 'All right, he may not be queer. He's just a nothing, which is worse. He isn't normal enough to have *any* kind of sex life' (106). She has noted, belatedly, the lack of fully realised sexual desire in Tom: while he may admire, idolised, flirt with, dream about, and envy Dickie, as Tom has himself expressed, he does not lust after men or women. The characterisation of homoromantic but asexual Tom approaches the 'void, or blankness' (Peters 173) that Peters notes in Highsmith's writing, and relates to Menninger's use of the term 'queerness' to describe schizoid types. 'Schizoid' should not be confused with schizophrenia, but alludes to the way such personalities exhibit a 'curious split, a duality, a "surface and a depth,"' (Menninger 77). This 'split' and 'duality' can be seen in Tom's. When he is entertaining Marge and Dickie in order to befriend them, '[h]is tongue rattled on almost independently of his brain. His brain was estimating how high his stock was shooting up' (50-51). Once he has assumed Dickie's identity, he exemplifies a split subject, presenting the relaxed persona of Dickie and attempting to evacuate, unsuccessfully, the self inner self, the 'depth' that preceded his act.

Of course, what Tom realises when he returns to being Tom is that 'Tom' is himself a surface—a series of gestures, a costume, and a voice—only arbitrarily connected to his internal life, which the world does not yet know: '[h]e hated becoming Thomas Ripley again, hated being nobody, hated putting on his old set of habits again' (164). He has to practice his old voice (106) and exaggerate Tom's traits and gestures to differentiate himself as Tom from himself as Dickie (170). The split could not be more apparent. Menninger describes how the schizoid type maintains 'one kind of front for the world to look at if it cares to (they don't care), but the real self, having looked at the world and renounced it, retreats into an inner unseen life. This we never get to know, except when an explosion occurs' (Menninger 77). Tom renounces the world bit by bit throughout the novel, as he has done so throughout his life: from his unconsummated, apathetic flirtation with the New York gay scene, to his unsuccessful attempts to hold down a job in a hostile city and his childhood neglect, the sense of inferiority, and lack of belonging installed by Aunt Dottie. Life has been a series of rejections and challenges which have cleaved Tom further from the world and stopped him making contact.

Heading to Europe is Tom's last chance to start a new life and to make connections with others. He wants Dickie to like him 'more than anything else in the world' (47). The unlikely affection readers feel for Tom is assured from these early sections, in which a detached, but hopeful, young man attempts to find a sense of meaning for himself in a new world: 'he would acquit himself well, and Mr Greenleaf would know that he had, and would respect him for it' (31).

What happens instead is that Tom fails. In spite of his attempts to connect, his split becomes apparent. This occurs at the breakthrough moment at which Tom loses hope, having recognized his own queerness and nothingness:

> You were supposed to see the soul through the eyes, … the one place you could look at another human being and see what really went on inside, and in Dickie's eyes Tom saw nothing more now than he would have seen if he had looked at the hard, bloodless surface of a mirror. Tom felt a painful wrench in his breast, and he covered his face with his hands. ... They were not friends. They didn't know each other. It struck Tom like a horrible truth, true for all time, true for the people he would know in the past and for those he would know in the future: each had stood and would stand before him, and he would know that time and time again there would always be the illusion, for a time, that he did know them... (78)

Dickie's eyes are like the surface of a mirror, in which Tom sees his own self-forgeries. The fantasy of proximity, intimacy and connection is snatched away, not only because of Dickie's lack of willing but because of the split that he has recognised in himself. The passage is also ambivalent: Tom sees his nature reflected back at him, but is he seeing in this way because his nature hinders him from seeing otherwise, or because Dickie shares the same personality type, the same 'schizoid' nature? Dickie has certainly gone to great lengths to isolate himself from his family—including his dying mother—and American society: he enjoys shallow encounters with long-distant friends like Freddie and his neighbours, and is passively indifferent to Marge. There is some justification for this view. Menninger does not suggest that all schizoid personality types will break down, kill themselves or commit crimes. If he did, he is unlikely to have defined Woodrow Wilson as a schizoid type. When a personality confronts a situation that they cannot adjust to and succeed in relation to, they may fail, but failure may take the form of a constructive compromise, for example the production of literature, art or an inventive enterprise (see Menninger 26,

‘Diagram of Adjustment Fig. 1.’). Dickie’s paintings, which are such an embarrassment to Tom, could be seen as a form of constructive compromise, something that Tom is not able to achieve. This would have implications for readings of Highsmith’s wider output if so, because it would suggest that Tom’s blankness and queerness are not just his own as a flawed, ‘psychopathic’ individual, but are states of being shared with ‘normal’ individuals like Dickie, or in later novels, his wife Heloise (see Gowrie xi).

In Tom’s immediate situation, however, this realization does not engender a feeling of empathy, but painful meaninglessness. Looking into Dickie’s eyes is a breakthrough, or rather, breakdown, moment for Tom. He watches Dickie and Marge prepare to go skiing without him, and is let down further by Dickie who cancels their planned trip to Paris for a poor substitute, the fatal weekend in San Remo. Menninger states that psychologists ‘must write about the mind as an adjustment process’ (Menninger 20), and from this point Tom is failing to adjust in the ways he has managed previously. Tom plans to kill Dickie when he has fully accepted his failure to hold on to him, a loss that makes Tom furious, full of ‘hate … affection … impatience … frustration’ (86). Rather than blaming himself and deciding to leave Dickie—which could be seen, in Menninger’s framework of environmental adjustment, as a compromise and ‘readjustment’—and rather than suffering a mental breakdown or committing suicide—becoming a ‘broken personality’ (Menninger 26)—Tom opts to break the situation itself. This ‘broken situation’ (Menninger 26) is the ‘explosion’ referred to by Menninger as the unexpected outcome that reveals a schizoid personality to the world (Menninger 77):

> He wanted to kill Dickie. It was not the first time he had thought of it. Before, once or twice or three times, it had been an impulse that vanished immediately and left him with a feeling of shame. Now he thought about it for an entire minute, two minutes, because he was leaving Dickie anyway, and what was there to be ashamed of any more? (87)

The earlier impulses may have been a sign that Tom was experiencing a ‘period of attempted adjustment’ (Menninger 26), but the break occurs when he thinks about the murder for longer than an instant.

He has ‘flown’ from the situation (Menninger 27) rather than adjusting himself to it, but the result is not, in Menninger’s schema at least, ‘insanity’. The ‘wrecker of situations’ (Menninger 27) has ‘chosen’ a different way out than the

person who breaks down. Menninger communicates this subtlety best through his case studies. For example, he describes a 'shy girl, pious, gentle, lamblike, [who] serves with satisfaction in a country home for years. One morning the three children of the house lie murdered. The house is in flames. She has not lost her senses, she understands everything, she smiles uncertainly when she realizes her act' (Menninger 77). In an American legal context dominated until 1954 by the M'Naghten Rules on criminal insanity—in which delusions and not understanding the nature of one's act were key legal determiners of insanity (M'Naghten's Case)—Menninger's word choice is crucial. The woman (a schizoid type) has not lost her senses, in the commonly understood sense of insanity, but she has failed to adjust to her environment, and has instead wrecked it. This is a frame of mind which, although it can hardly be called healthy, does not fit within common understandings of insanity and psychopathic behaviour as a simple explanation of crime.

This can be turned back on Tom. In 1949, Highsmith wrote that: '[t]he psychopath of the book is an average man living more clearly than the world permits' (Wilson 196). Highsmith felt that creativity was in many respects 'psychopathic', and felt a personal affinity with Tom, with whom she shared the characteristics of a 'splintered identity, insecurity, inferiority, obsession with an object of affection, and the violence that springs from repression' (Wilson 196). Wilson's biographical reading links Highsmith's experiences with the 'radical celebration of amorality' (Wilson 196) that she achieves in the Ripley novels. It is difficult not to be impressed with how Tom manipulates situations in ways that are represented as almost heroic. The threat, the appeal and the challenge of Highsmith's Ripley novels can all be associated with the Menninger-inflected tendency to see the 'breaking of a situation' in such a light: as a tempting alternative to adjusting oneself and conforming to normalcy, or becoming a 'broken personality,' suffering from insanity or committing suicide. Such a reading of insanity as 'weakness' is, of course, deeply flawed and does not address the realities of living with mental illness. However, in relation to the Ripley novels it provides a fruitful way of understanding Tom's personality and charting the changes that he undergoes throughout the series from a hopeful young man to a casual killer.

By way of conclusion, and to summarise the strands developed in this article, I would like to return to the suggestion made above, that Guy's experience of getting into the compartment with Bruno is like the reader's experience of *The Talented Mr*

Ripley: both find they are more willing than they might have expected of themselves to share the space of killers and criminals, and are brought disarmingly close to sharing their world view too. Like *The Talented Mr Ripley, Strangers on a Train* can be read a tale of an individual who fails to adjust. Guy is confronted with a situation which he cannot 'make', to use Menninger's term. He is a man of whom it could be said 'he is pushed across the line', 'he is driven insane.' Like 'most of us,' he 'gets hooked' (Menninger 3) in failed response to events which demand adjustment. The first situation occurs in the train when he fails to deal as he would like with the unnerving figure of Bruno. The correct answer—the answer that Guy wishes he could give—to Bruno's questions about whether he has ever come close to commiting a murder, is no. Even if this is not the truth, Guy feels it is his responsibility to close these questions down and leave: '[h]e wanted to break away from Bruno, get out of the carriage, but a nightmarish heaviness held him' (30). At key instances, Guy is unable to resist Bruno or act as he feels he should: when he realises that Bruno has murdered Miriam, or when Bruno starts sending information about his father's house to guide Guy through the murder. Even the murder of Bruno's father seems like 'Bruno's will, working through him' (143). Guy is tacitly complicit with Bruno from the outset, and this makes it easier for Bruno to manipulate him and draw him into a shared sense of responsibility for the murder, what Petrie refers to as the 'transfer of guilt', a theme Hitchcock developed in his movie version of the novel (Petrie 46). Guy becomes alert to his weaknesses, as well as those aspects of himself that he had believed were not part of him: 'I'm not that kind of person' (26), he claims, but later realises that 'good and evil, lived side by side in the human heart … One had merely to scratch the surface' (163). This touches on fears of a 'concealed enemy', as well as on notions of dualism and split subjectivity. Bruno, Guy's *other*, is described as his 'cast-off self' (163), who attracts and repels, and is one of a list of literary tormentors and doubles, from Gil-Martin (Hogg), to William Wilson (Poe) and Mr Hyde (Stevenson).

Finally, overlapping notions of sanity and insanity, normality and abnormality, make it difficult to determine the point at which Guy crosses the 'line', or indeed to mark the line at all. When Guy tries to threaten Bruno with accusations of insanity, the question of insanity is turned back on him: '[y]ou don't frighten me in the least. It'd be the easiest thing in the world to prove you insane,' Guy states, to which Bruno responds, 'I'm no more insane that you are!' (111). In mid-twentieth

century psychology and culture, the spectre of insanity was evoked as a threatening other to provide the final explanation for criminality, and those suffering from mental illness were stigmatised, pathologised and silenced. What Highsmith forces her readers to confront is the realities and the complexities of her characters' situations, aside from questions of their perceived pathological or abnormal status, and all that is generally offered as a reason not to listen. As a recent Guardian Book Blog entry suggests, Highsmith's writing to this day suffers from 'criminal neglect', because her books are 'creepy, amoral, but [written] with the kind of close observation that makes her warped characters strangely sympathetic, to the extent that you can't help rooting for them' (Shipley). Reading these novels is like getting into Bruno's carriage and listening to his story, but like Guy, readers may still find this experience too close to their own, and to reminiscent of what they fear in themselves.

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