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## The Talented Mr Ripley

Without wanting to be an essay "about" adaptations, this will be an essay about two cinema versions of a single book, Patricia Highsmith's thriller, *The Talented Mr Ripley*: René Clément's *Plein Soleil* (1959) and Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999). More interesting, arguably, than what each film does with its original material is what each film says about cinema. It is a truism to note that the two—one a French movie, the other an English-directed, American-backed one—come from quite distinct cinematic traditions; one (the French) that constructs meaning far more readily via the use of the visual language of film and mise-en-scène, the other (the British/American) that still appears to consider words and writing to be the backbone of a movie. This essential difference leads me to ruminate upon how the two films relate to their shared literary source and how they both choose to transcribe that original onto the screen. The two films share the catalyst of Highsmith's intriguing portrait of narcissism, covetousness and schizophrenia, but they have very different focuses and tones. Clément's version, with Alain Delon as Ripley in his first major role, attempts to transpose the essence of Highsmith's original onto the non-verbal aspects of cinema such as mise-en-scène,

including the use of heady, lush colour, a complicated camera style, Nino Rota's jarring, jazzy score and a fascination with Delon's insolent and insouciant beauty. There is also the unexplained oddity of *Plein Soleil* being inexplicably about two Americans (one—Dickie—who is now called Philippe) who just happen to converse in perfect French whilst living in Italy and whose friend, Freddie Miles, speaks French with an American accent. Minghella's version, as demonstrated by its use of the book's original title, remains more heavily reliant upon verbal communication. Although *The Talented Mr Ripley* does add several significant plot details, it nevertheless conforms to a more predictable type of cinematic adaptation that seeks to "explain" its literary source book via additions such as the creation of the character of Meredith Logue and the expansion of the character of Peter Smith-Kingsley.

*The Talented Mr Ripley* is the first in a five-book sequence of novels to feature Tom Ripley, an attractive pathological liar and criminal whose major talent is for impersonation and forgery and who aspires to acquire a wealthy lifestyle way beyond his slender means. As with many of Highsmith's other detective novels, the Ripley books are the antithesis of the traditional detective fiction stereotype. Rather than being on the side of the characters trying to solve the crimes and misdemeanours of others, we find ourselves on the side of the pathological, audacious anti-hero-cum-criminal trying to

return to America having failed in his mission, he kills Dickie and then embarks upon an elaborate impersonation of him. Along the way Tom has to kill one of Dickie's American friends, Freddie Miles, after he has discovered his scam but this works in his favour as the police, Marge and Mr Greenleaf gradually come to believe that Dickie killed Freddie and subsequently took his own life. At the end of the novel Tom is never found out, and in addition is bequeathed Dickie's trust fund by a grateful Herbert Greenleaf. This money, as we are told at the beginning of *Ripley Underground,* the next book in the cycle, is in large part what Tom lives on until he marries a rich French woman, Eloise, and embarks upon the rich, indolent lifestyle he had so hankered after in *The Talented Mr Ripley.*

The somewhat fluid relationship both adaptations have with their source material (additionally, Minghella's version sporadically alludes to Clément's film) brings to mind a remark made, in quite another context, by the American documentary filmmaker Albert Maysles on the question of truth and authenticity. Maysles (who with his brother David made such films as *Salesman, Gimme Shelter* and *Grey Gardens*) argues about his films:

> We can see two types of truth here. One is the raw material, which is the footage, the kind of truth that you get in literature in diary form – it's immediate, no one has tampered with it. Then there's the other kind of truth that comes in extracting and juxtaposing the raw material into a more meaningful and coherent storytelling form, which finally can be said to be more than just raw data.[1]

A completed film, even a non-fictional one, is for Albert Maysles a different entity to the documentary data on which it is based. If one pursues this analogy, the questions Maysles raises about authenticity and representation resonate interestingly for the adaptations of *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Maysles here raises doubts about the validity of sustaining a

distinction at all between the "authenticity" of any "original" material and the implied "inauthenticity" of any adaptation of it. If we transpose Maysles' observation to the question of adaptation facing us here, then the suggestion is that it is futile to judge the Highsmith novel as the "authentic" source the two adaptations deviate from. This is a compelling issue, particularly in relation to the narrative of Tom Ripley, a character conceived (in all three versions) as pathologically preoccupied with forgery and fakery, hiding his "true" character and assuming the identity of someone else. Developing Maysles' comment, this article will discuss the issues of the "real" and of stability of narrative, meaning and identity in relation to the two Ripley films, focusing on three areas: the characterisation of Ripley, sex and mise-en-scène. At the heart of this examination is the realisation that, being texturally such different kinds of films, *Plein Soleil* and *The Talented Mr Ripley* will tackle the abstract notion of the "real" in dissimilar ways. Whereas the French film is elliptical in its plotting and characterisation and relishes the instabilities offered by its complex musical score, inconsistent camera work or its unexplained motifs, Minghella's version of the story is more intent upon imposing logic and stability, whether this be to do with character, narrative or style.

**Ripley**

The two adaptations tackle the portrayal of Ripley's confused identity very differently. *Plein Soleil* evokes the radical identity politics of the novel, namely that there is no such thing as the "real" Tom Ripley, for the "real" Tom Ripley is to be found in the series of masquerades he performs. Tom's main performance is as Dickie Greenleaf after he has

killed him, and this is how Patricia Highsmith describes his assumption of the Dickie persona:

> He [Tom] had done so little artificially to change his appearance, but his very expression, Tom thought, was like Dickie's now. He wore a smile that was dangerously welcoming to a stranger, a smile fit to greet an old friend or lover. It was Dickie's best and most typical smile when he was in a good humour.[2]

Throughout the book Tom sees himself as others see him, he watches himself as traditionally John Berger and others have argued women are taught to do. Not only this, though: Tom Ripley also slips into being Dickie through adopting the gestures and mannerisms that he, Tom, in turn, has projected onto Dickie. These are not the gestures and mannerisms that we as readers recognise as being innately Dickie's; in fact, we know very little about Dickie except what Tom tells us and Tom is a notoriously unreliable narrator. What Tom thereby constructs is a fantasy that is an amalgam of Dickie and himself. Like the jigsaw of a famous painting, Tom's impersonation is not just imperfect and reliant for its effectiveness upon the imaginations of those who observe it, but it is always fragmented, never complete or whole. The novel's Ripley is a fraudster to whom imitation and deceit come so naturally that he is "empty" of meaning and his own identity is entirely subsumed into the pathological layers of imitation.

As if striving to capture some of his dissolvability, *Plein Soleil* starts in mid-action, with Tom already with Dickie (now Philippe) in Italy. This abrupt and high-pitched beginning has a destabilising effect as there is no establishing shot or scene. The film omits the chapters in New York that function precisely to establish Tom's rationale and motive for going in search of Dickie; instead, it throws us, its audience, in at the deep

end, unable for a while to understand what these two rather Euro-trashy young men mean to each other. This contravention of David Bordwell's maxim that a film doesn't just start, it begins, is the first in a chain of such unexplained events or scenes in *Plein Soleil*. There is, for example, the rather odd introduction of Dickie's girlfriend Marge through a close-up of her playing a mournful tune on the guitar gazing rather vacantly into the middle distance. Clément's Marge is not immediately positioned within the narrative as she later is in Minghella's version (lying next to Dickie on the beach); she, if only temporarily, exists beyond it.

The air of rootlessness that pervades *Plein Soleil* is exemplified particularly by two further sequences: Tom's extraordinary, obscure and unmotivated stroll around a Neapolitan fish market and his final, unlikely seduction of Marge. The fish market sequence takes place after Tom has killed Philippe (Dickie) in San Remo and has started to forge his friend's signature and pass for him when in Rome. Tom has temporarily returned to Mongibello to give Marge a letter he has written to her as Philippe. He and Marge have gone to Naples for the day and Tom leaves Marge alone to write a reply to, as she thinks, Philippe. Tom's amble around the fish market stands out because of its style and its startling lack of narrative relevance. The sequence is, for instance, shot with a documentary-esque hand-held camera that appears to be following and reacting to Delon as if the scene is improvised. Delon, in turn, is behaving out of character—no longer the meticulous and precise fraudster, more the movie star caught on his day off, chatting to the fishmongers, sampling their wares and looking about him as if expecting to see another, less obtrusive camera on him. If this sequence has any relevance at all it is in cementing our desire for and our desire to identify with the film's star through the

prolonged and numerous raw-edged and slightly breathless close-ups of him as he walks by with his jacket held nonchalantly over one shoulder. The impetus of the scene seems to be to capture Delon's easy, youthful, narcissistic beauty, his gracious though detached smile. Why, then, set such an iconic, abstracted scene in a fish market, intercutting Delon's tanned features with close-ups of several weird and different varieties of fish—the flat, white, small-faced ones stick in the mind—that serve to confuse the otherwise reverential tone. The perversity of this juxtaposition serves as just one indication that meaning and richness in *Plein Soleil* are imbedded not in plot and narrative so much as in mise-en-scène and tonal stylisation.

The establishment of a sexual relationship between Tom and Marge right at the end of the film is curious in a different way, most obviously by being entirely inexplicable through character. Tom is clearly not attracted to Marge except as Philippe's appendage. As Tom is now enjoying impersonating Philippe, the acquisition and

be broken as Philippe's corpse emerges from the sea tangled up in the anchor rope of the Greenleaf yacht. This ending (quite different from the getting-away-with-it calm that marks the end of the book) leaves the audience as bereft of logic and stability as they had been at the outset. Furthermore, Tom himself is as enigmatic, slippery a character as when he started; perhaps this is the inference to be gleaned from the fish market sequence.

In Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* the character of Tom Ripley is perceived quite differently and, in relation to the issue of making a distinction between the "real" and "fantasy" or the "unreal," the film likewise adopts a different perspective. Although Ripley as played by Matt Damon is psychologically unstable, he is logically so, in the tradition of much Hollywood or Hollywood-inspired cinema about psychological disorders. To explain: there is a solid sense, from the outset, that Ripley's instability (sharply represented in the film's title sequence by a series of broken, fragmented images like a series of shards of broken glass) is explicable and containable, that we the audience will comprehend his pathology and thus that Ripley will be containable and knowable and so not be a threat. Essentially, the underpinning logic of Minghella's Ripley (as

torturedness of his desires and the violence of his actions). Thus, as Tom, at the beginning of Minghella's adaptation plays the piano to the Greenleafs on the terrace of a plush apartment overlooking Central Park, our first impression of him is as a nice boy, a character with substance and depth, unlike the slippery person we are introduced to in both Highsmith's novel and in *Plein Soleil*. Similarly, the Tom Ripley who concludes Minghella's film, desolate after feeling compelled to kill his lover Peter Smith-Kingsley, is tortured by the realisation that he cannot return to being the "real" Tom Ripley but is instead condemned to a perpetual, identitiless limbo. Tom remains trapped in this version by the presence still of one character (the invented Meredith Logue) who thinks he is Dickie Greenleaf; in the novel, he is only ever mistaken face to face for Dickie by peripheral characters.

The final sequence of *The Talented Mr Ripley* takes place on board a ship bound

only as the "real nobody" that he will find "true" happiness in being loved by Peter. Peter then provides a sweet, affectionate list of attributes (that the "real" Tom Ripley is talented and beautiful, not a nobody, that he has secrets he won't tell and that he has nightmares) that paint an idealised portrait of Tom and say more about Peter's love than about Tom himself. However, the film strongly suggests that we are supposed to feel this is Tom returning to his "real" self, that the disguise has been dropped and that equilibrium has been restored. This return for Tom to a stable, substantial identity—the return of his repressed genuine self—is marked very clearly by the easy compatibility of his appearance with Peter's as they are both dressed in black (as indeed were both Tom and Dickie just prior to Dickie's murder). However, the equilibrium is extremely short-lived, for as Peter is identifying the qualities of his lover, so Tom is preparing to strangle him. The film does not show us Peter's death (perhaps because the spectator would then be left with an unerringly negative picture of Tom) but instead overlays images of Tom sitting alone on his bed undulating to the rhythms of the sea with the sounds of Peter's murder. Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* thereby opens and closes with the "real" self-loathing Tom.

Whereas *Plein Soleil* posited the more radical notion that there is no such thing as a stable identity, merely layers of masquerade, Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* retains a romantic attachment to the idea of Tom's "real" identity, an essential character that is subsequently repressed in favour of imitation and adaptation. We the audience are asked to respond very differently to Tom in the later version. We no longer merely admire or feel faintly nauseated by his gall and his dubious talents for murder and fakery as we do when reading the book or watching *Plein Soleil*, we pity him. Pity is a

sentimental and patronising emotion, one that makes the pitier feel superior to the pitied. Intermingled with empathy and attaching value to the figure inspiring the pity (in this case Ripley), the overriding quality of pity is that it reflects well on the one doing the pitying. The film's pity is rooted in the fact that Tom feels compelled to deny (because of a broad mix of feelings, from inadequacy to desire or envy) a true identity that appears, to Minghella's liberal sensibilities, to be laudably centred on being talented, being poor and being gay. These traits form the basis for all Ripley's actions and the emphasis upon them makes him less an amoral murderer than a tortured, morally aware one. This shift means, for example, that the underlying motivation for Tom's obsession with Dickie is more to do with sexual desire than with avarice and envy of Dickie's extreme wealth. Avarice and envy are ugly emotions, whilst desire is rather more attractive.

**Sex**

Sex, desire and eroticism play key roles in both adaptations. In neither the novel nor in *Plein Soleil* is Ripley's homosexuality overt. Much more significant to both is the realisation that Ripley is quite content to forego the potential pleasures associated with admitting his homosexuality in favour of leading a more luxurious but heterosexual existence, hence his later sexless marriage to Eloise. Tom's sexuality is never unambiguous in the novel or in *Plein Soleil*, in part, at least, because of the repressiveness of the age in which they appeared. The result of their rather furtive, elusive portrayals of Tom's sexual leanings, though, is to make the issue of sex a more intriguing one. As Michel Foucault argues, the impetus for the puritanical ideology of the modern age was to drive sex "out of hiding" and to compel it to lead a "discursive existence."[3] In terms of

the Ripley cycle, a comparable ‘outing’ of Tom occurs, beginning in the book with his deliciously confused fantasy that Dickie “would probably be so fond of him and so used to him that he would take it for granted they would go on living together.”[4]

the sequence—which otherwise remains close to the book—culminates in Philippe entering the room and venting his anger at Tom whilst brandishing a whip. From this moment on, Philippe is very much characterised as a *petit* sadist—a bit rough with Marge and deriving immense enjoyment from the ritual humiliation of Tom. There were already intimations of this side to Philippe in a very early scene in *Plein Soleil* when he and Tom are in Rome. In a scene substantially altered from the book (in which all Tom and Dickie do is offer a young woman they've jostled while drunk a lift home) the two men, walking the streets at the end of the evening, come across a blind beggar. Philippe wrests from

After the closet scene, the threesome go on Philippe's yacht, and Tom is criticised for not knowing how to handle the sails and then for having poor table manners. After eating, Marge and Philippe are talking and Philippe explains that he wants to see "how much he [Tom] will take." Philippe then puts this sentiment into action when he forces Tom into the safety dinghy, trailing behind the boat. Here, Tom falls asleep in the scorching summer sun and gets badly sunburnt, Marge telling Philippe, after administering cream to Tom's back, "You went too far. What kind of game is this?", an enquiry that prompts Philippe to reveal that he and Tom had never met prior to Tom's arrival in Italy. The heat hangs oppressively over the scene and Philippe's punishment of Tom, ostensibly for trying on his clothes, has become both overt in its physicality and covert in its meaning. The reading I have offered of this sadomasochistic sexual discourse suggests that it expresses Philippe's attempt to retain power over Tom, the character who has awakened the possibility that he, Philippe, is not completely contentedly heterosexual. Far from confirming Philippe's power, though, this sequence on the boat marks the transition towards Tom being in control. Delon's scorched, blistered body goes from signalling his vulnerability to symbolising his omnipotence. From now until the scene in which he murders Philippe, Tom's naked torso comes to dominate the mise-en-scène, resplendently tanned against the whiteness of his jeans and the boat or the luscious blue of the Mediterranean. The metamorphosis of the figure of masochism into the dominant object of desire completes the sadomasochistic subtext that in *Plein Soleil* exists instead of the discourse of homosexuality. Tom in this version is much more preoccupied (as he is in the original book) with narcissistically identifying himself with and as Philippe, of wanting to emulate him, then to enact him, then to acquire his life. In this respect, Tom's

narcissism (as well as our pleasurable identification with it) takes the place of Tom's direct desire for Dickie/Philippe and emerges victorious in *Plein Soleil*'s sadomasochistic "game."

In the Minghella version of *The Talented Mr Ripley* the discourse on sex has simply become a much more accessible discussion of homosexuality. Tom is identified, far more clearly in this version, as a closeted gay man and Dickie as slightly perturbed by both this and the possibility that he himself might not be totally, happily heterosexual. As if signalling its intentions to bring out into the open Tom's love for Dickie, *The Talented Mr Ripley* aches with Tom's desire and makes Jude Law's body, not Matt Damon's, the film's erotic focus. As in *Plein Soleil*, therefore, the link is made between repressed homosexuality and narcissism, although this time it is Dickie and not Tom who is overtly narcissistic. At the beginning of the film, Damon arrives at the beach in Mongibello in a lurid pair of lime-yellow swimming trunks clinging to his pasty torso. Desire is instantly transferred onto the bronzed, smooth, much more fashionably clad body of Law as Dickie Greenleaf, a pattern that—Peter's love not withstanding—remains

centrifugal force: the other characters are drawn to him (Marge, Tom, Freddie Miles, Silvana—the Italian woman Dickie has made pregnant and who kills herself), he arrests our gaze by wearing ostentatiously fashionable clothes and when he is undressed his body is invariably offered up for adoration. The addition of scenes and characters notwithstanding, this is Minghella's most flagrant departure from his source. Highsmith's Dickie—and Philippe in *Plein Soleil*—is a tedious rich-kid, a would-be painter whose lack of talent the author and Ripley mock. Conversely, Minghella, in order to make sense of Tom's fervent sexual desires, portrays Dickie not merely as immensely wealthy, but as an iconic ego-ideal. The most compelling illustration of this change is the representation of Dickie as a jazz fiend and a decent saxophonist; in the Neapolitan jazz bar, for instance, whilst Tom (whose "real" talents lie of course in classical music) is appalling at joining in with the jazz artistes on stage, Dickie is made for such an affected display of look-at-me-ness. Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* seeks to concretise the homosexuality that in both the novel and the earlier adaptation remains oblique innuendo, and its most important tool in this respect is Dickie's beauty and narcissism—who amongst us could fail to understand Tom's tortured desires?

The crisis at the heart of *The Talented Mr Ripley* is thus not merely to do with the distinct possibility of Tom being found out, but also to do with the potential discovery of the "real" Ripley's darkest secret—his homosexuality. Minghella's film, imbued as it is with a warm 1990s liberalism, becomes increasingly pro-Tom as his gayness becomes more apparent, his identification as homosexual supplanting the character's original identification within the context of a thriller as a pathological criminal. Ironically, however, as closeted subtexts give way to open declarations of gayness such as Tom and

Peter's elopement to Greece, the film's eroticism subsides. In the trying-on Dickie's clothes sequence the erosion is beginning. Unlike the same sequence in *Plein Soleil*, Minghella's version offers a more straightforwardly gay reading. Tom is prompted to rummage in Dickie's closet not because Dickie is making love to Marge (as is the case in both the book and Clément's version) but because he feels spurned when Dickie and Freddie exclude him from their jazz-listening orgy in a record shop in Rome. They literally shut Tom out of the listening booth and put earphones on. So, the underpinning rationale for trying on evening attire (why on earth Dickie would have taken this when he

It is significant, I think, that the cinematic moment this bath scene most clearly evokes is the censored “oysters and snails” bathing sequence from *Spartacus*

**Mise-en-scène**

*The Talented Mr Ripley*'s preoccupation with establishing a sense of a "real" Tom Ripley and its concomitant refutation of the notion that pervades both the original book and the first film adaptation that identity is inherently unstable, thereby has repercussions that extend beyond characterisation. Just as Minghella's redrafting of Highsmith's script is dominated by a desire to concretise the various fluid subtexts and make the issues of perversity and homosexuality more tangible and overt, so its mise-en-scène and visual style is rigidly realistic. Whereas meaning and subtext in *Plein Soleil* are, to a large degree, articulated through the expressive use of colour, music and camera, for example, comparable meaning in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is conveyed through narrative, action and accessories.

As demonstrated by the scene in the Naples fish market, several sequences exist in *Plein Soleil* that have no direct relevance to the plot. This scene, as previously discussed, is a cryptic ode to Delon's beauty, and throughout *Plein Soleil*, the significance of the mise-en-scene is underpinned by the film's dependence upon Delon's striking physical presence. As Donald Lyon puts it: "The movie is an almost abstract, lazily languorous study of eyes and hair; its plot is elliptical and confusing; the 'Americanness' of the characters is notional; the film just swoons into the star's chilly beauty."[6]

The most enduring feature of the visual style of *Plein Soleil* is the deep, chasm-like blue of the sea. Shot in Eastmancolor, the sea achieves an oppressive heaviness; its ripples may twinkle in the rich sun, but such superficial charms cannot mask the threat of the expanse below. As if to emphasise this, Clément divides the action roughly in two

halves—the sea sequences and the town or city sequences. The former scenes are

style of *Plein Soleil*

collage-like title sequence as if separating out the multiple layers of not only the narrative but also Tom. The use of these various themes, however, is never so consistent that the spectator can say "oh, there's a tense bit coming up" or "oh, this must be a romantic scene." There is no readily accessible thematic logic. Likewise, there is the impenetrability of the food symbolism (if indeed one can call it that) that emerges sporadically through *Plein Soleil.* Apart from the fish, there are the tomatoes and vegetables that tumble out of a paper bag Freddie is holding when Tom thumps him over the head. The camera rests on them as if they are about to reveal a secret, but they remain enigmatic, unlike the classical bust with which the same act of murder is committed in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, which rolls along the floor to reveal a blood-stained temple—naturally representing the damage Tom has done Dickie. With all these dissonant, bizarre factors *Plein Soleil* remains gorgeously cryptic till the end.

In Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley*, signification is transferred from mise-en-scène onto less elliptical factors such as narrative and character or costume and diegetic music. Thus, Rota's jazzy score is transmuted into Dickie's jazz playing, making "jazz" into a signifier for one character instead of a pervasive mood. What is lost in this transferral of jazz from score to plot is its unspecificity, its ability to resonate and convey mood or tone as opposed to merely action or character. Minghella would have us believe that his Dickie lives "la dolce vita," but the spirit of the Italian years of style domination and boom are more lastingly evoked by Nino Rota's kaleidoscopic music for *Plein Soleil*. The essential characteristic of being cool is that you don't realise you are—or that you become cool despite what you look like. This is the humour of Clément's Tom and Philippe in their "Eurotrash" suede shirt open to the waist, white Gucci loafers and

anachronistic striped blazer. By comparison, the costuming in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is too self-conscious and perfect; all of Dickie and Marge's outfits stand out as pristine and consummately stylish. As for Meredith Logue, her entire wardrobe has dropped off the pages of *Vogue*. This is not to say that the film's costumes do not give an abundance of visual pleasure—the braided cardigan Meredith is wearing when she bumps into Peter and Marge in Rome is exquisitely refined and the blouson-style 1950s sport shirt Dickie has on when Silvana is spied drowned possesses just the right caddish tone—it's just that every costume detail seems so completely to be being used to explicate character. Nothing is left to the imagination and this exhausting attention to tangible, surface detail becomes oppressive. The spectator feels ever so slightly patronised by Minghella's desire to clarify everything, to lay everything bare. An example of the essential difference between the two adaptations in this respect is to be found in their uses of the parade of the Madonna. In *Plein Soleil*, Ripley comes across a street festival in which the Virgin is being carried aloft through the streets when he returns to Mongibello after being questioned by the police about Freddie's murder in Rome. In this instance, the parade is an accidental detail, a piece of inconsequential local colour. Conversely, in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, the same event (which is not in the novel) becomes integrated into the plot as, just after the Madonna has been hoisted out of the sea, the locals crowding round spy the corpse of Silvana bobbing to the surface. Silvana (another character added by Minghella) is pregnant with Dickie's child and has killed herself because he won't help her pay for an abortion. The links are thus heavy handedly made between the Immaculate Conception and the illicit affair, and the rituals of Catholicism come to mask the rituals of deceit. *The Talented Mr Ripley* is full of such motifs but is empty of nuance.

**Conclusion**

In her review of *The Talented Mr Ripley* for *Sight and Sound*, Charlotte O'Sullivan quotes from Highsmith's one "lesbian novel" *Carol* in which she writes that the typical fate of homosexuals in fiction is that they have been "punished for their deviation, they've slashed their wrists or collapsed alone into a depression equal to hell."[7] This is the traditional "image of the homosexual as a sad young man."[8] O'Sullivan then astutely observes that this is exactly what happens to Minghella's Ripley, arguing that "It's only in comparison with Highsmith's book that [the film's] conservatism becomes clear."[9] Although O'Sullivan could have added that Minghella's adaptation is also far less radical than *Plein Soleil*, which she bizarrely does not mention, this is a valid remark that encapsulates *The Talented Mr Ripley*'s limitations. To return to my initial premise, the later film's limitations reside in its predilection for explanation, for the real as opposed to the abstract and for logic and plausibility over inconsistency and illogicality—in themselves a series of traits that have their roots in the cinematic (and theatrical) tradition whence Minghella comes. What lends *Plein Soleil* its danger, immorality and beauty is its defiance of such conventional qualities, traits that it shares with many another sparsely plotted or dialogued French movie. In direct contrast to *The Talented Mr Ripley*, what we have in *Plein Soleil* is a film that evokes rather than tells a story, that leaves ends loose and which is about a central character as enigmatic at the end as he is at the beginning. The narrative, like Delon's face, is inscrutable and mean (perhaps Clément's version would have been quite different if, as originally planned, Delon had played Philippe and not Tom). So, *Plein Soleil* is not a film "about" homosexuality, although it is a film

resplendent with desire; it is not a film that explains Ripley, although his form dominates the screen. *The Talented Mr Ripley* is more emotive and more straightforward; it concretises and rationalises the obscurities of both its literary and cinematic predecessors. Although this article has not been a discussion of the art of adaptation as such, in many ways the two versions of *The Talented Mr Ripley* have been shown to illustrate two contrasting approaches to the issue of transferring a novel to the screen, the one (*Plein Soleil*) transposing the destabilising effect of Highsmith's prose onto its visual and musical style, the other (*The Talented Mr Ripley)* adding to the story, using words and actions to make plain a narrative that would otherwise remain elusive. By the end of Minghella's film the spectator fully realises what motivated Matt Damon's Ripley; at the end of Clément's, on the other hand, one is left, as with Iago, with Ripley's flimsily motivated malignity–albeit bronzed and smiling (an expression that seldom looks sane or auspicious on Delon) on the shore of the Mediterranean.

**Notes**

[1] G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations: 15 Interviews with Filmmakers* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 277.

[2] Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955, London: Penguin, 1976), 109.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 33.

[4] Highsmith, 65.

[5] Ibid., 69.

[6] Donald Lyons, "Purple Noons and Quiet Evenings, " *Film Comment* 32.3, May-June 1996, 82.

[7] Charlotte O'Sullivan, rev. of *The Talented Mr Ripley*, *Sight and Sound* 10.3, March 2000, 53.

[8] Richard Dyer, "Coming out as going in: the image of the homosexual as a sad young man," *The Matter of Images* (London: Routledge, 1993), 73.

[9] O'Sullivan, 54.