

Save for her bugle-love. 45
 Save for the bleat of not-obese devotion.
 Save for Somebody Terribly Dying, under
 the philanthropy of robins. Save for her Ranger
 bringing
 an amount of rainbow in a string-drawn bag. 50
 "Where did you get the diamond?" Do not ask:
 but swallow, straight, the spirals of his flask
 and assist him at your zipper; pet his lips
 and help him clutch you.

Love's another departure. 55
 Will there be any arrivals, confirmations?
 Will there be gleaning?

Mary, the Shakedancer's child
 from the rooming-flat, pants carefully, peers at
 her laboring lover. . . . 60

Mary! Mary Ann!
 Settle for sandwiches! settle for stocking caps!
 for sudden blood, aborted carnival,
 the props and niceties of non-loneliness—
 the rhymes of Leaning. 65

1968

To the Diaspora¹

you did not know you were Afrika

When you set out for Afrika
 you did not know you were going.
 Because
 you did not know you were Afrika. 5
 You did not know the Black continent
 that had to be reached
 was you.

I could not have told you then that some sun
 would come, 10
 somewhere over the road,
 would come evoking the diamonds
 of you, the Black continent—
 somewhere over the road.
 You would not have believed my mouth.

When I told you, meeting you somewhere close 15
 to the heat and youth of the road,
 liking my loyalty, liking belief,
 you smiled and you thanked me but very little believed me.

1. People settled far from their ancestral homelands.

Here is some sun. Some.
 Now off into the places rough to reach.
 Though dry, though drowsy, all unwillingly a-wobble,
 into the dissonant and dangerous crescendo.
 Your work, that was done, to be done to be done to be done.

20

1981

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

1921–1995

Patricia Highsmith's career is connected to the most popular entertainments of the late twentieth century. Born in 1921 in Fort Worth, Texas, Highsmith worked in a comic book studio during World War II, writing heroic, jingoistic comic books with titles like "The Destroyer" and "The Fighting Yank." The influences of comics, crime and detective fiction, science fiction, horror, and Hollywood film are all palpable in her work, even as she consistently invoked such canonical European writers as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and André Gide when discussing her primary influences. The premise of one of her most famous novels, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), was inspired by Henry James's great novel *The Ambassadors* (1903), which features a naïve American man sent to retrieve the scion of a wealthy American family who has fallen prey to the seductions of Europe. Highsmith won prizes for detective and crime fiction throughout her life, in both Europe and America, but more traditional literary honors were elusive.

Highsmith's blend of the popular and the highbrow, of the visceral and the intellectual, distinguishes her work and has startled readers for over half a century. She died in 1995, just days before the publication of her thirtieth work of fiction. She had also written, in 1966, a handbook for writing suspense stories, and two additional story collections were published in the years following her death. Because Highsmith deftly combined the suspense plots of genre fiction with knotty philosophical questions and unforgettable characters, her work found a natural outlet in the movies. Her first novel, *Strangers on a Train* (1950), was adapted by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951. Later film adaptations of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (in France in 1960 and in the United States in 1999) and *The Price of Salt* (1952; adapted as *Carol* in 2015) have helped to keep Highsmith's fiction steadily in front of audiences.

Highsmith's most famous work—the five-novel Ripley series that began with *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and ended with *Ripley Under Water* (1991)—dared readers to sympathize with Tom Ripley, murderer of his rich friend, Dickie Greenleaf. Tom impersonates Greenleaf for a time after the murder, eventually taking over Dickie's clothes, possessions, relationships, and trust fund. Inheriting Dickie's money, Tom reverts to his own identity and goes on to lead a life of wealth and intrigue in subsequent novels. Readers found themselves rooting for Tom to succeed as Highsmith skillfully drew on class resentments, the dynamics of homophobia and homoerotic attraction, and the American tradition of the self-made man to craft her unlikely hero. As recent criticism points out, readers could understand Ripley as deviating from a 1950s repressive society, but in his materialism and upper-class strivings, they could also think of him as a model American citizen. Highsmith so identified

No velvet and no velvety velour;
 But who have begged me for a brisk contour, 5
 Crying that they are quasi, contraband
 Because unfinished, graven by a hand
 Less than angelic, admirable or sure.
 My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device. 10
 But I lack access to my proper stone.
 And plenitude of plan shall not suffice
 Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone
 To ratify my little halves who bear
 Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

1949

We Real Cool

THE POOL PLAYERS.

SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We
 Left school. We

Lurk late. We
 Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We 5
 Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
 Die soon.

1960

The Bean Eaters

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.
 Dinner is a casual affair.
 Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,
 Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good. 5
 Two who have lived their day,
 But keep on putting on their clothes
 And putting things away.

And remembering . . . 10
 Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,
 As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that is full of beads
 and receipts and dolls and cloths, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.

1960

the mother

Abortions will not let you forget.
 You remember the children you got that you did not get,
 The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
 The singers and workers that never handled the air.
 You will never neglect or beat 5
 Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
 You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
 Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
 You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
 Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye. 10

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim
 killed children.

I have contracted. I have eased
 My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
 I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
 Your luck 15
 And your lives from your unfinished reach,
 If I stole your births and your names,
 Your straight baby tears and your games,
 Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
 and your deaths,
 If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths, 20
 Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
 Though why should I whine,
 Whine that the crime was other than mine?—
 Since anyhow you are dead.
 Or rather, or instead, 25
 You were never made.

But that too, I am afraid,
 Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
 You were born, you had body, you died.
 It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried. 30

Believe me, I loved you all.
 Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you
 All.

1945

a song in the front yard

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
 I want a peek at the back
 Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
 A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now 5
 And maybe down the alley,

To where the charity children play.
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun.
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine 10
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
Will grow up to be a bad woman.
That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late 15
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate.)

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the streets with paint on my face. 20

1945

the white troops had their orders but the
Negroes looked like men

They had supposed their formula was fixed.
They had obeyed instructions to devise
A type of cold, a type of hooded gaze.
But when the Negroes came they were perplexed.
These Negroes looked like men. Besides, it taxed 5
Time and the temper to remember those
Congenital iniquities that cause
Disfavor of the darkness. Such as boxed
Their feelings properly, complete to tags—
A box for dark men and a box for Other— 10
Would often find the contents had been scrambled.
Or even switched. Who really gave two figs?
Neither the earth nor heaven ever trembled.
And there was nothing startling in the weather. 15

1945

From The Womanhood

The Children of the Poor

II

What shall I give my children? who are poor,
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,
Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand