In *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* (1966), Patricia Highsmith’s “how-to” book (and a work of characteristically displaced autobiography), the author describes the genesis of her 1964 novel *The Two Faces of January*:

My impetus for this book was strong but quite fuzzy at the beginning. I wanted to write a book about a young, footloose American (I called him Rydal [Keener]) in search of adventure, not a beatnik but a rather civilized and intelligent young man, and not a criminal, either. And I wanted to write about the effect on this young man of encountering a stranger who closely resembles his own domineering father. (11)

Despite her evident pride that the novel ended up on “the bestseller list in England” (Highsmith, *Plotting* 11), *The Two Faces of January* was poorly received by Joan Kahn, her editor at the U.S. publisher Harper and Brothers, and then by reviewers, all of whom found the plot—especially the question of Keener’s motive for his subsequent involvement with Chester MacFarland, the older man who leads him into crime—too implausible. In demanding a rewrite Kahn insisted: “The book makes sense only if there is a homosexual relationship between Rydal and Chester” (Wilson 230). Apparently furious at the prospect of rewriting the book, Highsmith nevertheless complied and, according to her biographer, Andrew Wilson, began to “completely rethink the
motivation of her characters.” In doing so, however, she tried even harder to “eliminate any suspicion of a homosexual relationship between the two men” (Wilson 231).

Deducing a homosexual motive is a temptation to which readers and interpreters of Highsmith’s work often succumb. The flaw of Anthony Minghella’s otherwise excellent film adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), for example, is its decision to make Ripley’s latent homosexuality manifest. “Queering” him in this way is a mistake, precisely because it provides a *motivation* for Ripley’s behavior that is never apparent in the novel and turns him into someone with whom viewers can identify. Ripley’s attitude toward Dickie Greenleaf is darker and more complicated. As Slavoj Žižek has put it,

Minghella’s Ripley makes clear what’s wrong with trying to be more radical than the original by bringing out its implicit, repressed content. By looking to fill in the void, Minghella actually retreats from it. Instead of a polite person who is at the same time a monstrous automaton, experiencing no inner turmoil as he commits his crimes, we get the wealth of a personality, someone full of psychic traumas, someone whom we can, in the fullest meaning of the term, understand. (15)

Motivation is rarely clear-cut in Highsmith. In fact, perhaps the most fascinating mystery in each of her novels is about the personalities of the characters she creates. Although we identify with their predicament and remain absorbed in their web of intrigue, their identities remain strangely opaque. Arguably, this is also true of their sexual identities. This essay aims, therefore, to suggest not that homosexuality is irrelevant to Highsmith’s fiction, but rather that the obscurity of the question of motive in her fiction makes it more profitable to consider its overall *homsocial* context—that is, the “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (Sedgwick,
Between 1). To do so, it will interrogate Highsmith’s relation to tropes of crime fiction and gothic, and point to her significance as a chronicler of the late-twentieth-century world.

**Between Men: Highsmith’s Queer Gothic**

Although the “fuzzy” yet persistent idea behind *The Two Faces of January* is particular to that novel, it is a version of what may be regarded as the signature obsession of Highsmith’s fiction: the influence of one man over another. This fascination was evidently there from the start. Wilson refers to an early story she wrote called “Mountain Treasure” (1943), which involves two men “who both spot an unclaimed bag on a station platform” and develops into “a bizarre cat and mouse game around the streets of New York” as one pursues the other until eventually he drops the bag out of “fear and shame” (93, 94). The recurring scenario in the novels she would later write involves two men who are somehow thrown together by chance—either through an accidental meeting (as in *The Two Faces of January* or the earlier *Strangers on a Train* [1950]), through a mutual other (*The Talented Mr. Ripley* [1955]), or through a tragic event (*Those Who Walk Away* [1967])—and who are unable to relinquish their obsession with each other, engaging in relentless pursuit until they do physical harm to one another.

It is little wonder then that Susannah Clapp called Highsmith the “balladeer of stalking” (96). Although some Highsmith novels such as *This Sweet Sickness* (1960) and *The Cry of the Owl* (1962) have a woman as the object of male obsession, usually the stalking is, to invoke Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s famous phrase, “between men.” More commonly in Highsmith, the woman is relegated to a subordinate position, a minor character involved with each of two men obsessed with one another—a vertex on the “Girardian” triangle of desire, man-woman-man.
Because it is typically “between men,” the fundamental Highsmith plot might well be regarded as part of another genre than crime fiction altogether, albeit a related one. George Haggerty has argued that *The Talented Mr. Ripley* exemplifies what he calls “queer gothic”—that is, fiction produced by a “wide range of writers, dispersed historically and culturally, [who] use ‘gothic’ to evoke a queer world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum” (Haggerty 2). Such “queer gothic” effects can be found in Highsmith’s other fiction as well, not least in this pattern of obsession between two men. Indeed, the centrality of the male “double-chase” plot in Highsmith reveals her fiction as the descendent of the kind of “paranoid gothic” tradition identified by Sedgwick as central to gothic literature of the nineteenth century.

For Sedgwick, the energies and anxieties expressed by paranoid gothic are summed up by a particular “tableau” found in many of its examples such as *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley’s novel boils down to “the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape,” which embodies “primal human essence or originary truth” (Sedgwick, Preface ix). Sedgwick argues that it “is importantly undecideable in this tableau, as in many others like it in gothic novels, whether the two men represent two consciousnesses or only one; and it is importantly undecidable whether their bond . . . is murderous or amorous” (Sedgwick, Preface ix). The paranoid gothic hero, she argues, is engaged on what is essentially an “epistemological project” that needs to be understood in the context of “male homosocial desire” and “the history of homophobia.” (Sedgwick, Preface viii)

The value placed by romantic literature and nineteenth-century philosophy on solipsism—a sense of being embodied in the world and in society that requires exploring “the question of the very existence of other minds” (Sedgwick, Preface ix)—is ultimately why this plot of the “reversible male chase” (Sedgwick, Preface x) is repeatedly generated, because it
encapsulates the perceived threat to the ideal of solipsism. More precisely, it represents “the labor of the paranoid subject to forestall being overtaken by the feared/desired other, by himself mimetically reproducing the perceived or projected desire/threat of the other in a temporally paralyzed form” (Sedgwick, “Preface” vi). Sedgwick draws on Freud’s understanding of paranoia as a mechanism rooted in homophobia to show how the gothic protagonist of paranoid gothic finds a way of turning the unutterable statement, “I (a man) love him (a man),” into other, more socially acceptable, formulations: “First, ‘I do not love him—I hate him’; second, ‘I do not love him, I love her’; third, ‘I do not love him; she loves him’; and finally, ‘I do not love him; I do not love anyone”’ (Sedgwick, Epistemology 161).

“Paranoid gothic” plots might be regarded as elaborations of these basic contradictory formulations. As such, they are the product of what Sedgwick terms “homosexual panic”—that is, the anxiety resulting from the unclear boundaries between homosocial intimacy and homosexual desire that existed throughout the nineteenth century or what she prefers to call “the Age of Frankenstein” (Sedgwick, Preface x). Until a fully articulated homosexual culture began to be formed in the late-nineteenth century as a result of the Wilde scandal, homosexuality and homophobia were projected onto other structures of division such as class. The paranoid gothic plot provided a form into which homosociality could be packaged, highlighting the distinctions between homosexuality and homophobia, and instituting acceptable forms of male-to-male engagement. Early gothic fiction, like Frankenstein, represented as monstrous those male figures who promised to transgress established heterosexual norms or acceptable homosocial desire.

Obviously the context of Highsmith’s work is quite different. In postwar Europe and the United States, the development of the discourse on sexuality (which nonetheless begins in the late-nineteenth century) ensured that sexual identity was clearly divided into three main types:
homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual. Yet, as Haggerty argues, queer gothic mutates and re-emerges at moments of anxiety regarding sexual identity: the mode “offers a historical model of queer theory and politics: transgressive, sexually coded, and resistant to dominant ideology” (2). Highsmith’s early period—the 1950s and 1960s—coincides with just such a “moment of anxiety,” for it is the point when a particular kind of paranoid homophobia was evident in the United States, one that centered on the image of the homosexual man as a disguised threat to dominant ideology. In their queer readings of The Talented Mr. Ripley (that nevertheless stop short of labeling Ripley as homosexual) both Haggerty and Chris Straayer draw on Robert J. Corber’s analysis of the construction of the homosexual as a “problem” in postwar U.S. culture. As a result of powerful discourses such as psychoanalysis and the impact of the Kinsey report (which revealed the remarkable extent to which heterosexual men had claimed to engage in homosexual behavior) a particular construction of the male homosexual emerged as one that was outwardly indistinguishable from the heterosexual man. The result, as Corber shows, was the outpouring of paranoia associated with the McCarthy era and an increase in disciplinary mechanisms to ensure homosexuals—and heterosexuals—remained under punitive surveillance and regulation to prevent them slipping under the radar (Haggerty 63). Homosexual men were considered dangerously subversive and actively prevented from taking government jobs for fear they might be susceptible to blackmail or capable of making advances to heterosexuals (Straayer 127).

This is one of two contexts in which it is productive to examine Highsmith’s “double-chase” plot. Haggerty’s and Corber’s work might lead one to surmise that the potentially gay men in her fiction, such as Ripley or Keener, might need to cover up signs of their sexuality for fear of persecution and even, in Keener’s case, reside in Europe precisely because they do not fit
Rather than open up a pointless game of “outing” Highsmith’s characters, the realities of the homosocial world of the 1950s and 1960s strengthen the notion that Highsmith’s fiction marks a resurgence of the paranoid gothic plot with a reversible male chase theorized by Sedgwick. Thus Ripley’s preoccupation with Greenleaf could be transposed easily into the terms of “the paranoid-associated homophobic alibi ‘I do not love him; I am him’” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 164), a more subtle formulation than tracing out a latent homosexual plot in Minghella’s film. *Strangers on a Train* could be described as the story of a man (Guy Haines) laboring in vain to prevent himself from being “overtaken by the feared/desired other [Charles Bruno], by himself mimetically reproducing the perceived or projected desire/threat of the other in a temporally paralyzed form” (Sedgwick, “Preface” vi). The relationship between the two men preserves the two “undecideable” elements to which Sedgwick refers: the bleeding together of the two consciousnesses into a single one and the pattern of their feelings toward one another fluctuating between the “murderous” and the “amorous”:

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. Bruno had prepared every inch of the way for him, and everything would go well because everything always went well for Bruno. The world was geared for people like Bruno. (Highsmith, *Strangers* 134)³

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**Men of the Crowd: Penetrating Crime Fiction**

The ubiquity of the male chase plot in Highsmith’s novels makes her fiction look less like “crime fiction” and more like “queer gothic” or even “late paranoid gothic.” But the male double chase
is also central to a second literary context, crime fiction. This is another tradition rooted in the nineteenth century, influenced by gothic but also independent from it (presumably why Sedgwick does not deal with it in her books). From its inception in the 1840s until the present day, crime fiction in all its varieties repeatedly throws up examples of a plot that revolves around one man pursuing another. Some examples include the battle of wits between Dupin and D—in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” Holmes and Moriarity in Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Final Problem,” Matthäi and the killer in Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s The Pledge, and Quinn and Stillman in Paul Auster’s City of Glass.

The two traditions—gothic and crime fiction—converge in what has been widely regarded as one of the originary tales of modern crime fiction: Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1840). This is the story of a convalescent narrator—a version of the nineteenth-century flâneur, comfortably able to render intelligible the complexities of the city and the crowd—who, bored in a coffee shop in London, observes people going past the window and confidently classifies each person. This continues until the sight of a mysterious old man who resists all his efforts to “read” him shatters his composure. He rushes out into the crowded streets and pursues him obsessively for a whole day until he gives up, defeated, concluding that “[t]his old man . . . is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd” (Poe 481). The story ends with the narrator linking the old man to the illegible heart of darkness of the modern world by quoting from the widely “unreadable” German translation of the Hortulus Animae: “es lässt sich nicht lesen” [it does not let itself be read] (Poe 481).4

In his reading of the story in “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” (1938), Walter Benjamin argues that Poe is actually presenting readers with the possibility of a modified version of the flâneur that was more appropriate to the modern world: the literary detective, a
man whose suspicious nature gives him the ability to root out the idiosyncrasies of the individual seeking refuge in the crowd and consequently the capacity to read the modern world. The narrator of the story is not yet a detective, but—as Poe’s Dupin stories written in the years immediately after show—he is a clear prototype.

Benjamin famously called Poe’s story an “X-ray picture of a detective story,” in which “the drapery represented by the crime has disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man” (48). Although Dana Brand has plausibly contended that Benjamin, unaware of Poe’s American publication dates and mistakenly thinking “The Man of the Crowd” follows rather than precedes Poe’s Dupin tales, really means “embryo” of detective fiction rather than “x-ray” (79), there is a suggestive value in Benjamin’s analogy as it stands. Poe’s story has already seen through the genre before it develops.

“The Man of the Crowd” might usefully be considered another version of the paranoid gothic tableau identified by Sedgwick. The combination of her and Benjamin’s insights might lead one to ponder whether the “engine” of crime fiction is actually something other than an interest in crime or society or a questing hero, but the very mechanics of homosocial obsessive pursuit—the compulsion of one man to know (or to desire, fear, or eliminate) another. Crime fiction thus might have a homosocial core running through it, and all the trappings of crime and punishment that we find in text after text are merely details wrapped around this structure to ensure it remains palatable. Benjamin’s “x-ray” error, if it is an error, nevertheless has the effect of isolating the key mechanism at the heart of the genre and opening it up to alternative readings. It might point to new ways of considering ubiquitous detective fiction tropes as the role of paranoia in the detective’s epistemological quest, the relationship between detective and sidekick, and the role of the femme fatale in noir thrillers.
Arguing that aspects of detective fiction are founded upon the homosocial would require a lengthy, complex discussion that space considerations do not permit here. But a conclusion more relevant to the task at hand is that Benjamin’s x-ray reference brings into focus the more outlying examples of crime fiction narratives that adhere less to the established conventions of its various subgenres. There are many stories in which the detective elements are pushed into the background, or dispensed with entirely, in favor of a preoccupation with obsessive pursuit. As well as diverse examples such as Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo* (1958), Marc Behm’s literary noir thriller *The Eye of the Beholder* (1980), and Sophie Calle’s work of conceptual art (*Venetian Suite*, 1981), Highsmith’s fiction presents a compelling case. Rather than explore matters of investigation or justice, Highsmith’s energy is devoted in her fiction to exploring the psychological development and disintegration of her main characters, and her deployment of the double-chase plot brings out the element that is arguably suppressed or contained by the formulae of standard crime fiction: its latent homosociality.

*The Two Faces of January* and *Those Who Walk Away* are the Highsmith novels in which the basic chase scenario is at its starkest. The encounter with MacFarland leads Keener swiftly, and apparently on impulse, to compromise his own freedom by providing MacFarland with an alibi for murder and then accompanying/pursuing him to other locations in Greece, Crete, and Paris. Keener becomes sexually involved with MacFarland’s young wife, Colette—whom MacFarland accidentally kills while trying to murder Keener. *Those Who Walk Away* tells of the mutual obsession between the young Ray Garrett, another privileged young American-abroad artist-*manqué* like Keener, and his former father-in-law, Ed Coleman. Coleman holds Garrett responsible (without foundation) for the suicide of his daughter, Peggy. Against the evocative backdrop of a foggy, wintry Venice (so often the location for modern double-chase plots),
Garrett repeatedly tries to convey to Coleman what really happened to Peggy, but Coleman’s response is to try to kill him. The novel becomes an elaborate cat-and-mouse game where each man hides from the other; plays dead (letting the other assume he has killed him); and encounters the other again by chance, setting the cycle in motion again.

In each novel the cat-and-mouse element is played out in repetitive, almost monotonous detail, although Highsmith’s skill ensures both plots preserve her trademark suspense and intrigue. In fact, the way she handles the double-chase plot reveals the inadequacy of Sedgwick’s tableau metaphor. The literary double chase involves more movement, more narrative, and more suspense than the image of a tableau can convey. The preferable word is *choreography*, a more narrative term suggesting a pattern of movements and steps, or even—to choose a different metaphor—a sequence of moves in a game. The choreography in Highsmith figures, as the tableau does in Sedgwick’s reading of nineteenth-century gothic, as a structure “embodying primal human essence or originary truth” (Preface ix). In Highsmith’s case, however, the “truth” it conveys is about the effects on individual identity of the particular homosocial regime that typifies late capitalism. Highsmith’s chase novels suggest that the double-chase crime plot might be regarded as a modern descendent of the paranoid gothic plot, something that has mutated from its home in the “Age of Frankenstein” to become a model that fits the realities of a different homosocial regime: the modern urban world in which men are placed side by side in large cities and forced by the development of capitalism into ruthless competition with each other.

“Perhaps Identity, Like Hell, Was Merely Other People”: Highsmith’s Double Chase

Highsmith’s world is characterized not by the philosophical solipsism associated by Sedgwick
with the nineteenth century but by the ruthless individualism promoted by late capitalism in the late-twentieth century. Ripley and his acquisitive “business” style would obviously be a case of this individualism taken to a pathological extreme. But Coleman provides a more mundane and therefore representative example. He is a painter whose attitude to his art could not be further from romantic aesthetics. His “current phase” is described as “pop art” (Highsmith, Those 18), the mode of modern art that was most self-consciously pitched toward the market. In each aspect of his life, his impetus is pure business: “The Smith-Peters were typical of the people Coleman collected for social and economic reasons. They probably cared little about art, but Coleman could sell them one of his paintings” (Those 22). Women are part of the currency that fuels Coleman’s business dealings: “Coleman could take a woman, with whom he contemplated an affair, to a party given by people like the Smith-Peters, and impress her” (Those 22).

MacFarland adheres to a similarly ruthless business ethos, one that is supported by a framework of male homosociality. He is a professional criminal who makes money by preempting the stock sales of North American companies before they are listed on the stock exchange. In a typically Highsmithian example of how the shadow-world of crime mirrors the processes of modern business, he has a network of operatives in various states, a homosocial group of employees—“his man in Milwaukee, Bob Gambardella,” “Vic, his salesman in Dallas” (Faces 23)—who do the selling and then send him the money via mailboxes labeled with assumed names.

This is the domain of the entrepreneur rather than the flâneur, or perhaps it is an updated “ex-pat” flâneur who, instead of traversing the crowded urban spaces of London, moves with ease between European locales, exhibiting a confident power over his “field of vision” that is
testimony to the advent of America as the major player in the age of global economics, consumerism, and tourism:

The next morning [Garrett in *Those Who Walk Away*] arranged for a night flight to Venice, sent a telegram to reserve a room in the Pensione Seguso on the Zattere quay, and made four telephone calls to painters and art galleries in Rome, which netted him two appointments. (*Those 6*)

Keener is quite at home in Greece, reading newspapers, smoothing over things with the locals when MacFarland seems poised to give the game away, whereas Coleman “now considered himself ‘European’” (*Those 18*). In both *The Two Faces of January* and *Those Who Walk Away*, two of these refashioned flâneurs encounter each other while the rest of “the crowd”—the natives, other travelers—remain either insignificant or are confined to roles as bit players (like Niko in *The Two Faces of January* or Luigi in *Those Who Walk Away*).* Both pairs in the two novels—Keener/MacFarland, Garrett/Coleman—are rootless, transient, effectively homeless, yet apparently wealthy enough to remain indefinitely in Europe, staying in good hotels and eating in good restaurants, with the passport and the traveler’s check their key means of passage.

The economic and intercontinental freedom of these characters forms part of the texture of a familiar male homosocial world. The way their women, Colette and Inez, relate to MacFarland and Coleman is similar to the homosocial triangles in nineteenth-century fiction explored by Sedgwick: each woman is entirely beholden to the man in all matters of existence, from where they will eat each evening, to where they will live their lives, to what their next step should be in the drama (which they have become involved in through no fault of their own). This homosocial texture is paralleled at a deeper, structural level in each novel by the latent homosociality of the double-chase plot.
This structure can help make sense of two mysteries about the central characters in each novel. The mystery that hangs over *The Two Faces of January* is why Keener first helps and then continues to accompany MacFarland. Both of the reasons he himself initially favors (the older man’s resemblance to his father, and his attraction to Colette because she reminds him of his cousin Agnes) are dismissed when he acknowledges in a letter to his brother: “I am using this man for my own inner purposes…. A psychological purge by some sort of re-enactment that I don’t even understand yet is going on in me” (*Faces* 126). In *Those Who Walk Away*, why does Garrett remain in Venice when Coleman means him harm? It would be logical to leave the city after Coleman’s first attempt on his life, even more so after the second. But he remains, resisting even a visit to the police until the end of the novel.

The absence of a clear motive seems to correlate to the curious inconsequentiality of each novel’s plot. At the end of *The Two Faces of January* MacFarland is dead, but it is not Keener who kills him; rather, a policeman shoots him during in a scuffle. *Those Who Walk Away* fades out even more surprisingly. Both men remain alive at the end, and the novel concludes with nothing more exacting or dramatic than a police caution issued to Coleman. These endings are a long way from the dramatic finale associated with the modern crime thriller.

Sedgwick’s theory of the paranoid gothic chase can make sense of the motivation of the young protagonists and clarify what each gain or lose from their pursuit of the older man. Most obviously, the structure of masculine paranoia would seem to apply in each case, for the cat-and-mouse plot of each novel might usefully be seen as a way of turning the formulation “I (a man) love him (a man)” into, respectively, “I do not love him, I love her” (*The Two Faces of January*) and “I do not love him—I hate him” (*Those Who Walk Away*). Moreover, the distinctive triangulation of desire identified by Sedgwick in *Between Men* also structures each formulation,
with Colette and the dead Peggy, respectively, the female point of the triangle in each case. One consequence of Keener’s and Garrett’s existence in a world where men enjoy all the freedom and economic power would be that they inevitably pit themselves against their older, outwardly successful male rivals in an ambivalent mixture of admiration and hostility. Each novel thus raises the possibility of a strongly Oedipal dimension to each homosocial relationship, in which Keener sees MacFarland as a version of his disapproving father, and Garrett tries to gain the approval of his former father-in-law, Coleman.

Although plausible, this still does not sound like Highsmith. To reduce each novel to such neat psychoanalytic equations that show how (in Sedgwick’s terms) the homosexual is transformed into the homosocial—that is, to decide that each man pursues the other because he is secretly in love with him—risks falling into the homosexual-motive trap referred to earlier. One reason this reading may jar is the author’s own understandable sensitivity about reductive sexual coding. As her “rethink[ing] the motivation of her characters” (Wilson 231) in *The Two Faces of January* suggests, Highsmith worked hard to insulate her fiction against the practice of imposing onto it—or onto twentieth-century people—the codified labels “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” and “bisexual” instituted by contemporary discourses of sexuality. This sensitivity may have extended to an instinctive awareness on Highsmith’s part of the inherent homophobia of the plot motif she favored: the double chase. Her chase plots would still be *homophobic* in Sedgwick’s sense, insofar as the homosocial, the homoerotic, and the homosexual cannot be separated in her “homosocial continuum” (Sedgwick, *Between 1*), and they still represent a pervasive cultural anxiety.¹ Yet they carefully resist a decisive term of “homosexual.”

Whether or not it would have found favor with Highsmith herself, a more pertinent point here is that the paranoid-mechanism formula cannot neatly apply to the plots of these novels.
This is because Highsmith’s characters are not the kind of substantial and understandable individuals that can be found in nineteenth-century fiction. Highsmith’s world is a depersonalized one. Her fiction reflects the ways in which modern automated society empties individuality out of people, making their engagements with the world automated and reflexive. It is fitting that the kind of linguistic formulation used by Highsmith throughout her fiction is the flat division of people into types such as “those who walk away” or Bruno’s “[a]ny kind of person can murder” (Strangers 26).

One crime fiction motif to which Highsmith was drawn is false identity. Ripley is the most accomplished in taking on the official identities of other people and gains most from it. He achieves money, freedom, and eventually (in the later novels in the “Ripliad”) a respectable and sustainable professional status. But the outcome is quite different in The Two Faces of January and Those Who Walk Away, even though it is just as extensive. Garrett takes on the names of “Thompson” (after Coleman pushes him off a boat and he is fished out of a lagoon) and subsequently “Philip Gordon” and “Giovanni Wilson,” whereas Coleman eventually assumes the name “Ralph.” In The Two Faces of January, MacFarland goes about this process more professionally, usually arranging for a new fake passport each time. He adopts a series of different identities throughout the novel: “Howard Cheever,” “Richard Donlevy,” “Louis Ferguson,” “William Chamberlain,” “Philip Wedekind,” and “Oliver Donaldson.” Keener becomes “Joey,” “Pierre Winckel,” and “Enrico Perassi.”

But each case presents not a matter of postmodern or poststructuralist “performative subjectivity” as it can plausibly be considered in The Talented Mr. Ripley (see Trask). These are only names, labels that allow those who bear them to signify and continue to move under the gaze of officialdom. They are taken on simply for brief tactical gains rather than (as Ripley
seeks) a more extensive strategic benefit, enabling their bearers to gain nothing other than the short-term advantage of eluding the grasp of the police or each other. The character behind the name stays the same: mysterious, certainly, but unchanging and, effectively, empty. In fact, without the name, the character does not seem to exist. This is most clearly conveyed in the striking passage in Those Who Walk Away, when, having cast off his official identity and gone into hiding, Garrett thinks:

“I’m not Ray Garrett tonight, I haven’t been for days. Therefore I should be in a state of freedom such as I’ve never known before.” For a few seconds, he recaptured his sensations of the morning after the night in the lagoon, the morning when he had awakened in the hotel room and stared out the window and thought, “The view could be the view of a dozen Italian cities, and I could be anyone, because I’m no one.” Now he hadn’t the anxiety he had felt that morning. He was no one again, without Peggy, without guilt, without inferiority (or superiority either), without a home or an address, without a passport. The feeling was easeful, like a letting up of pressure. Ray supposed that many a criminal in hiding could have such a feeling, too, but it would be partly spoilt by their knowledge that they were in that state for the purpose of concealment and escape from the law. His state was a bit purer and happier. Perhaps identity, like hell, was merely other people. (Those 121)

Without an official identity, you are no one in Highsmith. But at the same time, having an “official” identity does not equate to having “substance” or “individuality.” As he is not trying to escape the law, Garrett does not even have the consolation of motive. His predicament is that
what has happened to him has visited upon him a kind of freedom, but this has in fact stripped him back to nothingness or simply revealed that there was nothing there anyway.

To use Žižek’s words, there is a “void” at the heart of Highsmith’s men, and her novels do not allow readers to sense a “wealth of a personality, someone full of psychic traumas, someone whom we can, in the fullest meaning of the term, understand” (15). This applies especially to Ripley, but it is also true of Keener, MacFarland, Garrett, and Coleman, as any attempt to analyze their motives suggests. Despite the murderous/amorous desires involved in the struggle between both pairs of men in these novels, the emptiness of their individual selves means that it is true to say their struggle is not, in fact, “personal.” Highsmith’s characters become *subjected* to emotions and motivations and not because of any personal investment. These are people who act out of compulsion rather than motive, or, to put it in Lacanian terms, these are people governed not by the law of desire, but by that of the drive.

This points to how we ought to conceive of the “male reversible chase” in Highsmith. It is not an “epistemological project,” but simply a reflexive mechanism into which each of the participants has been cast as a result of some obscure emotional trigger. The double chase may, as Sedgwick wagers in her reading of its persistence in the “Age of Frankenstein,” encapsulate some “truth” about subjectivity, but in Highsmith’s hands it reveals an entirely different perception of subjectivity. Identity is always assumed and always requires “other people,” either in the sense of taking over the identity of another or requiring the engagement with another to validate one’s own identity. This is another consequence of the chase, in that one man’s obsession with another gives that other man identity. In this sense the male chase is still homosocial, but it is more existential than personal.

Given how character is presented in Highsmith, it is appropriate that the repetitive
structure of the chase itself should be as prominent in her fiction as the interrogation of subjectivity. This is especially the case in *Those Who Walk Away*, the most gothic of Highsmith’s chase novels, a crime novel without a murder, a novel that might be called a “hate story” in the way a love story might be called as such: “Coleman would obviously risk his own life, or life imprisonment, for it. People did that for love quite often. Coleman was doing it for hatred” (*Those* 133). Mark Seltzer has explored the remarkable extent to which this novel is structured as a repetitive game:

Two men take turns following each other through the streets of the mazelike city of Venice, trying to kill each other. Or, more exactly, they take turns killing each other and then, resetting, and “turning the tables,” repeating the series of moves once more: “Very well, if it had to be done still again, it would be done again.” The game—“play dead”—can simply be replayed, in that the game is independent of real life or real death.” (732–33).

For Seltzer, the novel demonstrates how in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century world, identity is a matter of “reflexivity,” a way of acting according to the ways compelled by the strictures of modern, automated society, constantly observing oneself and referring to oneself as if one were an other, devoid of any distinctive or substantial personality. Highsmith’s fiction is symptomatic of this world.

**Those Who Follow**

Not long after Coleman pushes Garrett off the boat, he starts work on a new style of painting, one in which the artist depicts “the human figure seen from directly overhead. He felt this view,
showing little, still showed much” *(Those* 94). If a similar perspective is adopted when examining novels like *Those Who Walk Away* and *The Two Faces of January*, taking a vertical view of a tableau rather than a horizontal one, the small-scale cities and towns of Highsmith’s characters become like the surface of a board game; the people become depersonalized and come to resemble coordinates in a pattern or pieces in a game. This depersonalization is something effected by Highsmith’s fiction at the level of characterization. Her characters are flat, unsure of their own identity, readily given to assuming names, yet uncertain that this practice enables them to perform a new self. The double-chase plot underlines this depersonalization at the level of structure. Her characters are compelled, driven, and positioned in the appropriate coordinates by the nature of the modern world.

Their compulsion means, finally, that they are *not* the kind of people “who walk away.” In the passage that explains the title of *Those Who Walk Away*, Coleman’s partner, Inez, uses the phrase to refer to people who are too afraid to report something like the discovery of a dead body to the police. In response, Garrett thinks, “Everybody would rather walk away” *(Those* 221). But the fact is that he, Coleman, Keener, MacFarland, Ripley, Haines, or Bruno are not actually the kind of people who “walk away.” Of course, dealing with the police is something each man avoids whenever possible. Yet being “unable to walk away” might be considered shorthand for *compulsion* in Highsmith, and her men are unable to walk away from the chase. Despite being urged to do so by Inez, neither Garrett nor Coleman is able to walk away from each other and their conflict. They are instead, like other pairs of male characters in Highsmith—those who follow.
Notes

1. See Nicol’s *Stalking* (123–25) for a discussion of *This Sweet Sickness* in the context of erotomania.

2. The locations favored by Highsmith—Italy, Greece, and North Africa—in novels such as *The Talented Mr. Ripley, The Two Faces of January, Those Who Walk Away,* and *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969) were the traditional places where affluent men, male artists, and male writers like the poet Keener would travel “in search of adventure” and liberal places where scandal-free homosexual activity could be pursued (Aldrich). The author is grateful to Patricia Pulham for pointing this out.

3. *The Price of Salt/Carol* is the exception that proves the rule as far as this aspect of Highsmith’s work is concerned. Its plot is typical of Highsmith’s crime fiction in that it revolves around the mutual intertwining of two people’s lives after a chance encounter. Like *The Two Faces of January,* it involves a younger person who develops a fascination with an older one. But *Carol* is an “inside-out” version, the equivalent of the photographic “negative,” of her typical double-chase plot: unlike the rest of her fiction, the fascination is between two women and develops into love. The interesting question about *Carol* is why the relationship between them develops fully, properly in a sense (even though of course it is continually under threat and cannot be allowed, socially, to flourish), whereas the relationship between the pairs of men in her fiction leads to violence. The obvious answer would be that it has to do with Highsmith’s own sexuality: lesbian love is permitted and follows a normal course. All other attractions “between men” are murky and displaced, seen in Ripley’s for Greenleaf in *The Talented Mr Ripley,*
Keener’s for MacFarland in *The Two Faces of January*, and especially Garrett’s for Coleman in *Those Who Walk Away*. The modern male-homosocial world, which Highsmith’s novels depict in detail, requires that men pit themselves against one another as rivals.

4. For an analysis of Poe’s story and detective fiction and the many readings—and misreadings—of the story, see Nicol, “Reading.”

5. Highsmith was well known to be uninterested in the whodunit. A mission statement is issued at the start of her fiction when, in *Strangers on a Train*, Haines picks up one of the books scattered in the train’s Drawing Room No. 3 and notes in boredom, “It was a detective novel. They were all detective novels” (Highsmith, *Strangers* 18). Even though police detectives and private investigators appear throughout her novels and sometimes (as is the case with Gerard in *Strangers on a Train*) figure out the crime completely, they remain incidental characters.

6. See, for example, Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, Ian McEwan’s *The Comfort of Strangers*, Nicholas Roeg’s film *Don’t Look Now* (which dramatizes a Daphne du Maurier story), and Calle’s *Venetian Suite* (see Nicol, *Stalking*).


