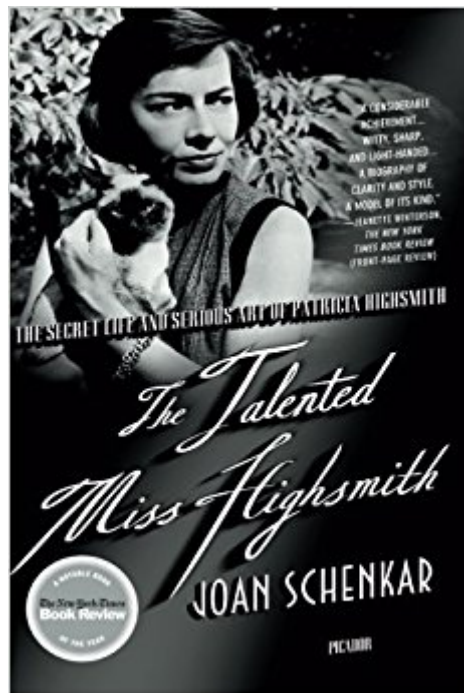




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The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life And Serious Art Of Patricia Highsmith



Synopsis

Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* is now a major motion picture (Carol) starring Cate Blanchett and Mia Wasikowska, directed by Todd Hayes. A 2010 New York Times Notable Book, A 2010 Lambda Literary Award Winner, A 2009 Edgar Award Nominee, A 2009 Agatha Award Nominee, A Publishers Weekly Pick of the Week. Patricia Highsmith, one of the great writers of twentieth-century American fiction, had a life as darkly compelling as that of her favorite "hero-criminal," the talented Tom Ripley. Joan Schenkar maps out this richly bizarre life from her birth in Texas to Hitchcock's filming of her first novel, *Strangers on a Train*, to her long, strange self-exile in Europe. We see her as a secret writer for the comics, a brilliant creator of disturbing fictions, and an erotic predator with dozens of women (and a few good men) on her love list. The Talented Miss Highsmith is the first literary biography with access to Highsmith's whole story: her closest friends, her oeuvre, her archives. It's a compulsive page-turner unlike any other, a book worthy of Highsmith herself.

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Customer Reviews

She kept 300 snails as pets. She drank a quart of gin a day. She considered robbery worse than murder. She left the United States to live in Europe because of what she called "the Negro problem" --- by which she did not mean discrimination against Negroes, but the civil rights movement that had Negroes demanding their rights. A houseguest once left her window open; she threw a dead rat inside. She took tips left on restaurant tables. She'd drive 60 miles to get a cheaper spaghetti dinner. She called Hitler's extermination policy a "semicaust", because only half the world's Jews died. She thought that "life didn't make sense without a crime in it." Her idea of happiness was to

write a murder. At 1:30 in the morning, standing in a lover's apartment, she didn't hesitate to call another woman. "I am a man and I love women," she wrote. She liked young blonds, very made up. A mental health professional, observing her for only a few minutes, pegged her as a psychopath. Another writer described her as "a black cloud." Her own assessment: "If I were to relax and become human, I could not bear my life." No wonder, then, that Joan Schenkar begins *The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith* like this: "She wasn't nice. She was rarely polite. And no one who knew her well would have called her a generous woman." Why would you even think of reading more than 600 pages about such a monster? Well, because Highsmith wrote a half dozen books --- among them *Strangers on a Train*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and a wonderfully sexy, though never graphic, lesbian novel called *The Price of Salt* --- that will be read as long as readers like fiction that equally thrills and chills.

I love the cover photograph of Highsmith, and the title of this book is clever, but otherwise this is a terrible biography. The way the author jumps all over the place in time, sometimes going back and forth between a few decades within two paragraphs is very confusing and makes for an unpleasant reading experience. The reason I purchased this is because I am a huge fan of Highsmith's work and have read all of her novels at least twice. Some of her novels, like *This Sweet Sickness*, I have read over ten times. I have never done that with any other author. For some reason Joan Schenkar spends almost the entire length of this biography trashing Highsmith's work and writing style. From reading this you'd get the impression that only maybe one or two of her novels were worth reading. She also trashes Highsmith as a person by only focusing on the most negative traits of her personality. I'm sure we have all done bad things during our life or acted childish at some points, but I have a hard time imagining that Highsmith spent every moment of her life being drunken and miserable with a scowl on her face. That is just way too cartoonish for a real-life person. If she was really that unpleasant how could she have had so many friends and admirers over the years? It seems like half the information in here is based on the accounts of bitter ex-lovers, if you wanted that you may as well get it firsthand by reading Marijane Meaker's memoir about the time she spent with Highsmith. I am a fast reader, and not easily distracted, I am also an obsessive fan of Patricia Highsmith, it's normally a delight for me to read anything about her. This book has taken me about two years to finish reading.

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