



Anxiety and Evil in the Writings of Patricia Highsmith

Fiona Peters

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Drawing on an impressive range of secondary material, including many elusive reviews, interviews and articles from the under-explored Highsmith Archive, Fiona Peters suggests that the usual generic distinctions -crime fiction, mystery, suspense - have been largely unhelpful in elucidating Patricia Highsmith's novels. Peters analyzes a significant selection of Highsmith's works, chosen with a view towards demonstrating the range of her oeuvre while also identifying the main themes and preoccupations running throughout her career. Adopting a psychoanalytic approach, Peters proposes a reading of Highsmith that subordinates murder as the primary focus of the novels in favor of the gaps between periods of activity represented through anxiety, waiting, lack of desire and evil. Her close readings of the Ripley series, *This Sweet Sickness*, *Deep Water*, *The Tremor of Forgery*, and *The Cry of the Owl*, among others, reveal and illuminate Highsmith's concern with minutiae and the particular. Peters makes a strong case that the specific disturbances within her texts have resulted in Highsmith's writing remaining resistant to explication and to the more sophisticated interpretative strategies that would seek to position her within a specific genre.

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