

Patricia Highsmith

Exhibition of the Swiss National Library
10 March – 10 September 2006

Life and work

- 1921 19 January. Birth of Mary Patricia Plangman in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. Daughter of Jay Bernard Plangman and Mary Coates Plangman, who were divorced shortly before her birth. Her parents are self-employed graphic artists.
- 1924 Mary Plangman marries the graphic artist Stanley Highsmith, who later adopts PH.
- 1927 Move to New York City. PH spends her youth between New York and Fort Worth, where she is put on and off in the care of her maternal grandparents.
- 1938–1942 PH studies English literature and composition at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, NY. She obtains a Bachelor of Arts degree.
- 1942–1948 PH earns her keep as a dialogue writer for the publishers of comics' magazines and works on her own writing during her spare time. She also draws and paints, principally travel impressions from her many trips to Mexico and later Europe.
- 1948/49 Her stay at Yaddo, the artists' residence in Saratoga Springs, NY, enables her to finish her first published novel, *Strangers on a Train*. She goes through psychoanalysis and is engaged for a short time to the writer Marc Brandel.
- 1950 Publication of *Strangers on a Train*. The film adaptation by Alfred Hitchcock – the first in a series of adaptations by celebrated directors—brings inklings of fame.
- 1951–1953 PH sets out on a journey of more than two years through Europe (United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany and Austria).
- 1952 PH's second novel, *The Price of Salt (Carol)*, appears under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. It soon becomes a cult book for the homosexual community.
- 1955 Publication of *The Talented Mr Ripley*, which receives several prizes, including the coveted Edgar Allan Poe Award. From then on, PH publishes a new novel (including four more Ripley adventures) every two to three years. She often has to find new publishers and is asked to rework her novels extensively. She also publishes numerous short stories in magazines. These later appear as book collections.
- 1964 Following several long trips to Europe, permanent move away from the United States, to the United Kingdom at first. PH lives with a woman friend in Earl Soham (Suffolk), where she buys a house.
- 1967–68 Move to France, where she attempts, for the last time, to live with a female partner (settles in Fontainebleau, then Samois-sur-Seine, then Montmachoux).
- 1969 PH's thirteenth novel, *The Tremor of Forgery*, which incorporates impressions from a trip to Tunisia in 1966, is considered her best by Graham Greene.
- 1970 Trip to the United States. Her reunion with her mother in Fort Worth, following lengthy explanations by correspondence, is disastrous and leads to a permanent breaking off of relations. Move to Moncourt, close to Fontainebleau.
- 1980 PH undergoes several surgical operations to remedy blood circulation problems.
- 1982 A conflict with the French tax authorities precipitates PH's move to Switzerland, where she settles in Aurigeno, in Val Maggia.
- 1986 Lung cancer operation. PH stops smoking.
- 1988 Move to the house in Tegna (in the Centovalli, close to Locarno in the Swiss canton of Ticino), designed by PH and realized by the architect Tobias Ammann.
- 1995 4 February. PH dies from the effects of cancer and aplastic anaemia (bone marrow failure) at the hospital of Locarno. Her twenty-second and last novel, *Small g: a Summer Idyll* is published posthumously. PH bequeaths her money to Yaddo. The Swiss Literary Archives (SLA) acquires her literary papers in 1996.