ABSTRACT

ZACHARY MILLER SMITH. Empathy for the Devil: Shifting Narrative and Perspective in Patricia Highsmith’s “The Talented Mr. Ripley” and Its Cinematic Adaptations. (Under the direction of Professor Marsha Gordon.)

ABSTRACT: Patricia Highsmith’s novel The Talented Mr. Ripley inspired two acclaimed cinematic adaptations, Purple Noon (1960) and The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999). Both adaptations make significant changes to the original novel, the story of a troubled young man who is hired to retrieve the son of a wealthy shipping magnate, only to wind up killing the son and assuming his identity. In a close examination of key scenes from the original novel and the two films, the differences become more apparent, such as the use of an unreliable limited third-person perspective in the novel, the main character being more of an active, seductive figure in Purple Noon, and the 1999 film overtly emphasizing elements of implied homosexuality from the novel. However, this close examination also illustrates how the films use these differences to engage with the novel’s storyline through the emphasis of different themes—and help reveal how Highsmith’s story generates empathy for a murderous, sociopathic main character.