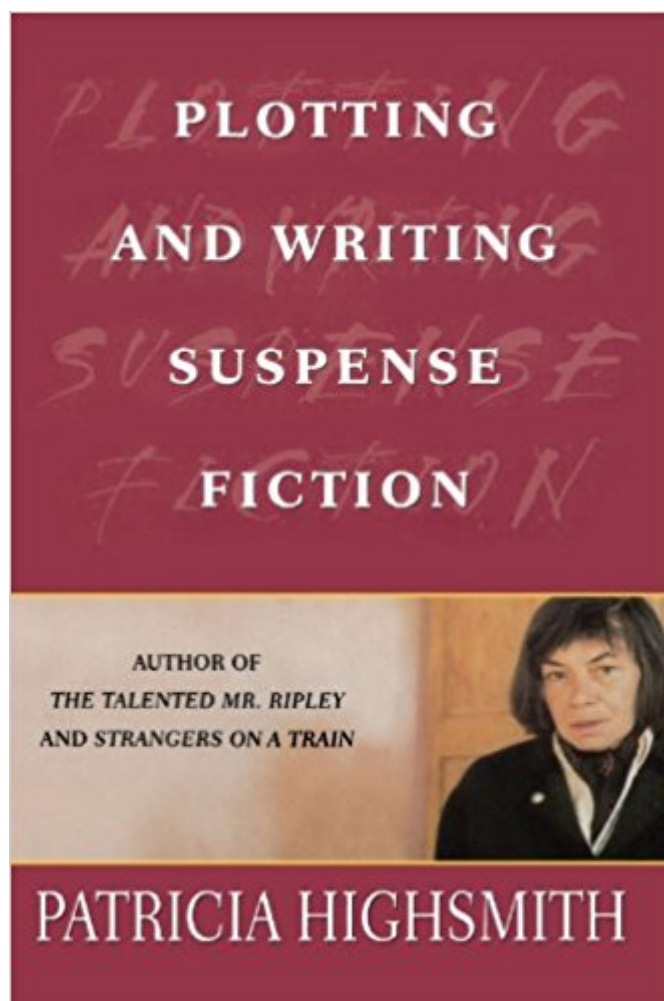




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Plotting And Writing Suspense Fiction



Synopsis

Patricia Highsmith, author of *Strangers On a Train*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Found In The Street*, and many other books, is known as one of the finest suspense novelists. In this book, she analyzes the key elements of suspense fiction, drawing upon her own experience in four decades as a working writer. She talks about, among other topics; how to develop a complete story from an idea; what makes a plot gripping; the use (and abuse) of coincidence; characterization and the "likeable criminal"; going from first draft to final draft; and writing the suspense short story. Throughout the book, Highsmith illustrates her points with plentiful examples from her own work, and by discussing her own inspirations, false starts, dead ends, successes, and failures, she presents a lively and highly readable picture of the novelist at work. Anyone who wishes to write crime and suspense fiction, or who enjoys reading it, will find this book an insightful guide to the craft and art of a modern master.

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Customer Reviews

Suspense, like other genre fiction, is often assumed to be inferior in quality to more "serious" fiction. A suspense story can be every bit as well-wrought as any other, argues Patricia Highsmith in *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*. To show how, Highsmith focuses as much on her failures as on her successes. Amid discussions about growing ideas, story development, plotting, first and second drafts, and revisions are anecdotes from Highsmith's own career. Highsmith (*Strangers on a Train*) admits to editing with crayon (doing so "gives one the proper cavalier attitude"), napping on

the job (it helps solve problems), and having written one "really dull" book. Though this book is slim, there are some lovely thoughts on such issues as creating a murderer-hero with "pleasant qualities," "stretch[ing] the reader's credulity," and using "as much care in depicting the face and appearance of ... main characters" as a painter would with a portrait. --Jane Steinberg

From the author of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* comes a how-to manual on her craft. In *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, the late Patricia Highsmith gives advice on generating ideas ("It is amusing to let the imagination play with such incidents as a faintly heard song and an invaded apartment, and to see what evolves from them"), helpful practices (keep a notebook), overarching philosophies ("The first person you should think of pleasing, in writing a book, is yourself") and specific craft issues ("where should one place the climax in a book?"). The advice is all sound (particularly her ideas on "almost incredible" coincidences), and her status as a suspense heavyweight and a commercial success make her book eminently credible. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

The book provides some insights into how Ms. Highsmith viewed and approached writing as a business, which clearly fit her personality and worked for her. On the other hand, she nearly comes out and says the reader will not likely have the same success with her approach because each writer more or less needs to develop his or her own approach. Highsmith provides no mechanics, but offers several examples of prose that worked or didn't from her manuscripts and manuscripts of other authors. Although I finished the book thinking of Ms. Highsmith as more of a real person than merely the author of books I've enjoyed, that wasn't my purpose for buying the book, which was to learn more about the writing and publication process.

This book is not exactly a how-to book. It is more like a long conversation with a mystery author I highly revere. Patricia Highsmith had her own style and a unique atmosphere in her stories. She always managed to bring a likable quality to her characters while still carrying them to a point of disturbance where the reader almost feels claustrophobic. Of course authors get inspiration from others, but she was not someone trying to write like somebody else to gain notoriety. So how much help will you get from an author who was arguably in a category by herself? By receiving precious ounces of what is most valuable to any aspiring writer: inspiration. She will make you think of your own feelings about the structure of your story, about the discipline you need as a writer. And she does this without the formality of a college textbook, but rather by pointing your attention towards

major points. Don't read the whole book while on a long flight. Read it over several reading sessions and let it sink in. Then, if you are contemplating your own creation while reading "Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction", you will suddenly find yourself getting much more from this book than the mere arguments the author makes. It will become significant to you in a unique and personal way. I have also experienced that this book, like an old friend, can bring your attention back to the writing project that really matters to you when you get distracted.

I'd never read any of her books (I'm more the blood-and-guts fan), but this how-to book is exceptional

I'm glad I bought this book. As an author of suspense myself, I found it very worthwhile. It won't teach you how to write--but I've found no book can really do that. In the same vein as Stephen Kings book On Writing, it is more an account about how this highly successful author developed her craft over the years, her successes and failures. If you want a how to guide you would be better off with another title. It also enhances the enjoyment of this book if the reader is familiar with Highsmith's books. I found it interesting to know where she got her ideas and how she developed a small incident into a novel.

EVERYTHING AS STATED. WILL UY HERE AGAIN

This review will focus on the actual print quality of the book, which is terrible. The back cover copy is almost blurry and the interior printing doesn't look very professional. It's like someone took photos of the original layout of the book from the 80s and used a mediocre digital printer for this edition. The print quality distracts from the actual content of the novel. If you're a Highsmith fan and want to write and/or learn about the craft of writing a thriller, you'll find this book interesting. If you're a beginning writer, I'd look for a more comprehensive book on craft and save this book for later.

I've read plenty of books on the subject of writing, few of which are excellent. This is one I would rate as excellent and highly recommend it.

Great!

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