Wieland Schwanebeck, *Der flexible Mr. Ripley. Männlichkeit und Hochstapelei in Literatur und Film* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2014), 391 pp.

Forgeries and fakes, Martin Doll observes, do not imitate originals but the attributions and attribution systems that define what counts as an original in a given historical and discursive context.[1] The same holds for impostors and con-men who play social roles in order to deceive. Real and fictional impostors therefore instructively foreground implicit and often overlooked social conventions, such as masculinity codes. This is the key argument Wieland Schwanebeck develops in eight densely argued but highly readable chapters on Patricia Highsmith's most popular character: Tom Ripley. He features in five of her novels and in numerous adaptations for film, the stage and radio.

The five Ripley novels, from *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) to *Ripley Under Ground* (1970), *Ripley's Game* (1974) and *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (1980) to *Ripley Under Water* (1991), are exemplary for Highsmith's subtle but profound interrogation of literary and cultural conventions (in particular gender-related ones) under the guise of bland realism. Schwanebeck's study draws on recent approaches in masculinity studies and on narratology to address their presentation of gender, their interrogation of a dichotomy of original and copy, and their angle on concepts of conventional masculinity.

The study opens with a brief cultural history of the conman and the impostor and an outline of the theoretical approach. Unlike the German *Hochstapler*, whose lasting literary fame Thomas Mann established with *Die Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (1922), the American con(fidence) man has turned into an ambivalent cultural icon for an egalitarian, competitive society: He violates the code of honesty and mutual trust yet embodies the ideal of the successful self-made man. Schwanebeck opts for the German term in order to put Tom Ripley into a larger intertextual and cultural context, one that includes, among many others, the picaresque tradition (chapter four), Thomas Mann's novel, French, British and German screen adaptations of Highsmith, and art forgery (chapter five).

Impostors and conmen outside fiction are, first and foremost, performers: Their success rests on the mastery of conventionalized social roles and the "scripts" of interaction, as Schwanebeck observes with reference to the sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman's theory of social interaction as role play points to the fundamentally narrative, performative and often literally textual nature of confidence tricks—playacting, forged documents and biographies, and confessional autobiographical narratives are essential components of successful imposture. The expertise of literary studies can therefore be brought to bear on this phenomenon with some justification, the study argues (53-55). This argument could have been developed with more confidence—no pun intended—since the psychological, legal, and sociological perspectives Schwanebeck surveys in chapter two narrow down confidence tricks to their pathological or criminal aspects and do not even begin to capture their cultural significance.

What, then, can real and fictional conmen and impostors tell us about masculinity? They foreground its performativity and its imitative character, the study argues with reference to Goffman, Judith Butler and Michael Kimmel. Masculinity is construed *differentially*, that is, in opposition to an excluded other such as the feminine or the early twentieth-century cliché of the effeminate man, the "sissy" (chapter four). A concise survey of current positions in masculinity studies (74-79) zeroes in on the issues of hegemonial masculinity (Raewyn Connell) and masculine habit (Pierre Bourdieu; 84-89) to explain how gender conceptions are naturalized and normalized. Schwanebeck is chiefly interested in forms of "unmarked," normalized gender performance (78, 94, 95) since they are often sidelined in studies pivoting on tropes of "gender in crisis" or on marginalized forms of androgyny or homosexuality.

The performativity of masculinity in characters that *conform* to norms of hegemonial masculinity also deserves more attention from narratology, Schwanebeck claims next. If gender dualism is a problematic but ubiquitous category in social life, it is also an implicit category guiding the act of reading. Readers are positioned as masculine, for example, in specific narrative perspectives. Gender, as cognitive approaches to literature suggest, is

[1] Martin Doll, *Fälschung und Fake. Zur diskurskritischen Dimension des Täuschens* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012) 21.

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inscribed into the deep structures of texts so that a "sexing of narratology" is called for (15, 16, see chapter three).

With this theoretical and historical scaffolding in place, Schwanebeck turns to *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and its technique of unreliable focalization. Schwanebeck argues convincingly that we need to consider focalization if we look for conventionalized gender positionings of readers because other than voice, even internal focalization is associated with transparency and objectivity. Inconsistencies in focalization in Highsmith's novel (151-158) sensitize readers to the fragility of the masculine roles presented diegetically and achieves a subtle, almost unnoticeable interrogation of conventionalized attributions of masculinity in the act of reading.

The chapter on *Ripley Under Ground* shifts its perspective to the instability of distinctions between original and copy in the fields of aesthetics and masculinity. In the second Ripley novel, the motif of art forgery, impersonation and the aestheticization of crime reads as a meditation on Derrida's and Butler's ideas that signification systems, including gender, do not refer back to authenticity or originality but, on the contrary, construe these phenomena in a notoriously instable manner (178).

Images of fatherhood and the nuclear family, finally, are the focus of Schwanebeck's reading of the three remaining novels. Here, references to stereotypes and narratives of masculinity in popular culture place Highsmith's men and women characters in cultural context and elaborate the *relational* construction of masculinity. The constellation of tutor and pupil in *Ripley's Game* and *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* is discussed in terms of Highsmith's sometimes satirical refashioning of conventional role models such as the self-sufficient, active hero and the paternal, benevolent provider and educator. In the novels, they are shot through with half-articulated homoerotic desire and are marked as performances, as the cross-dressing episode in *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* unmistakably suggests. While these instances seem to indicate a subversive take on conventional masculinity, the protagonist's return to the role of heterosexual husband in *Ripley Under Water* complicates such a reading. The novel's pervasive imagery of immersion, Schwanebeck argues, points to an acceptance of conventional, "unmarked" masculinity. But he further observes that acceptance is not the crucial point here—what is significant is the very act of *marking* masculinity as performance. Though not a subversion of gender roles, marking masculinity de-naturalizes the heterosexual matrix.

The study's wide theoretical scope, ranging from a sociology of culture to gender studies to narratology and film studies, makes it instructive for everyone interested in masculinity, the motif of imposture or Patricia Highsmith's Ripley series and its adaptations. Moreover, it is a welcome new departure in Highsmith criticism since it dispenses with the long-standing but misleading debate whether she is a crime writer or not, and also finds good arguments for dismissing another dominant critical trend, namely interpretations along psychoanalytical lines. The claim that Highsmith criticism is generally bogged down in "psychoanalytical biographisms" (344), though, is too strong: Fiona Peter's intricate Lacanian reading of Highsmith's novels, for example, is not arguing biographically; and Mark Seltzer's observations on Highsmith also strike off on a very different, systems theoretical path.[2] But on the whole, the study offers both instructive close readings of novels and films, an engagement with the recent cultural history of imposture, and a thought-provoking invitation to think about lived and narrated "normal" masculinities as constructions and performances.

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[2] See: Fiona Peters, *Anxiety and Evil in the Writings of Patricia Highsmith* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2011) and Mark Seltzer, *True Crime. Observations on Violence and Modernity* (New York, London: Routledge, 2007); "Parlor Games: The Apriorization of the Media." Critical Inquiry 36.1 (2009): 100-133; "The Daily Planet." *Post45. Special Issue on Patricia Highsmith,* 2012. Web. http://post45.research.yale.edu/. Accessed 7/1/2014.

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