(72–85), *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are both cogently presented, especially in terms of the former's fraught publication context and the latter's preoccupation with totalitarianism and human frailty within the context of Orwell's own rapidly failing health.

One of the most interesting sections of this short book is its concluding chapter which considers Orwell's critical reception during his own lifetime and posthumously. The latter has developed in diverse directions since his death in January 1950 when Stephen Spender described him as 'a kind of English Candide of the twentieth century' and Bertrand Russell lamented the personal cost of his innate 'love of humanity' on his own health and personal relationships. The impact of various biographies and film, theatre, and operatic versions of his works is succinctly summarized, as is the so called '1984 countdown' during the early-1980s and the build-up to his centenary in 2003. It is also noted how firmly Orwell is still fixed in the English cultural imagination, for example, in Simon Schama's comparison of Sir Winston Churchill and Orwell as the two great architects of the twentieth century in his *The History of Britain: The Fate of Empire* (2002). Similarly, Orwell himself would probably have been both intrigued and delighted by the experience in October 2009 of hundreds of Amazon Kindle owners who found one morning that their selections of Orwell had mysteriously disappeared from their new-age reading devices (due to his publisher withdrawing electronic dissemination rights). Rodden rightly concludes that Orwell has entered the twenty-first century as the 'most widely read, serious English-language writer and most frequently cited political journalist of the twentieth-century' and this *Cambridge Introduction* offers a valuable service in making the complete range of his writings readily accessible to all interested readers.

Michael G. Brennan
University of Leeds

doi:10.1093/notesj/gjt119

Advance Access publication 11 July, 2013

Fiona Peters, *Anxiety and Evil in the Writings of Patricia Highsmith*. Pp. viii + 206. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011. £55.00 (ISBN 978 1 4094 2334 8).

IT is because Patricia Highsmith is an enigma that her writing, according to Fiona Peters, has received little critical attention. In *Anxiety and Evil in the Writings of Patricia Highsmith* Peters contends that it is due to the impossibility of categorizing her work (2)—floating between the genres of crime fiction and serious literature—that she has been wrongfully denied her place in particularly American academic discussion (3). Beneath the flatness and clarity of the language, Peters unearths complex characters with their evil obsessions lurking under a conventional façade (5).

Throughout her study, Peters employs a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework that is supposed to shed some light on the motivations and ethics of the characters. In particular, she introduces Lacan's concept of the 'sinthome'. This, according to Slavoj Žižek, is a 'psychotic kernel evading the discursive network' (27). All Highsmith's characters experience 'jouissance' through their sinthomes in specific ways, offering them a reprieve from the oppressiveness of the Symbolic.

The first of Peters' three lengthy chapters focuses on three of Highsmith's early novels, *Deep Water* (1957), *The Cry of the Owl* (1962), and *This Sweet Sickness* (1960). The protagonists retreat from the symbolic universe of the middle-class ideal, the happy suburban families (13) into their respective 'waiting rooms'. No final escape from this stifling universe is allowed to these characters, but their retreat into psychosis allows them at least to 'achieve distanciation from the, for them, unbearable pressure of a desiring universe' (35). The second chapter focuses on exile as a different type of waiting room. In her analysis of *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969), *Edith's Diary* (1977), *The Price of Salt* (1952), *Found in the Street* (1986), and *Little Tales of Misogyny* (1975) the focus lies on exile in the sense of relocation in space, as well as femininity. While exile in space mirrors Highsmith's own exile from and unease with America, the grotesque female

bodies of *Little Tales of Misogyny* 'force the masquerade of femininity into the public arena' (139) and reveal it as a fantasized construct of the phallic, symbolic order. The final chapter is devoted to the *Ripley* novels. Unlike the other protagonists, Ripley is much better at negotiating his way in the symbolic universe without belonging to it. His acts of Kantian 'radical evil' are a means to an end to protect the sanctity of his waiting room. Furthermore he functions as sinthome for Highsmith herself, since, 'because she writes Ripley, she is able to withstand her life' (149).

Peters' Lacanian approach takes her very far in explaining the mechanisms leading to the protagonists' social marginalization and eventual isolation from the other. Highsmith's protagonists suffer from anxiety because they realize that their image of the other is fantasized, that they never reach the other as such. This is most convincingly argued in the Ripley chapter, in the reading of the murder of Dickie Greenleaf in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) 'Thus the gaze that Tom mistakes for Dickie's look is his own projection' (169). From that moment on Ripley suffers from anxiety in a Kierkegaardian sense precisely because he hovers between aesthetics and ethics. The difference between Ripley and the other protagonists is that, while the others slide into psychosis, he can fill the void with 'objects and interests' (160). However, Ripley never reaches the space of the ethical as he 'cannot understand that he must love' (155).

Unfortunately, it is precisely with the question of the ethical that Peters' Lacanian reading straitjackets Highsmith's texts into a meaning that they do not contain. This is most blatantly the case in her reading of Vic's murder of his wife in *Deep Water*: 'If the murders are really against his own interests, then it might be argued that these are ethical in the sense that they are pursued in search of an ideal rather than for his individual satisfaction. . . . Vic's murders are evil acts insofar as they violate and destroy the humanity of the other person. Yet, from Kant onwards, the choice for evil has been theorised in terms of the Good, and thus the disinterested, ethical realm' (63). Frankly, this argumentation is highly disturbing, as it is something that could have come from the lips of Anders Breivik. It does not help that Peters tries to corroborate her statement with an equally disturbing Žižek quote: 'The truly first choice is the choice between . . . yielding to one's pathological leanings or embracing radical Evil, an act of suicidal egoism that ''makes a place'' for the Good' (63).

At times her attempts to salvage Lacanian dogma despite contrary evidence in the texts are simply irritating: 'While individual sexual relationships are, of course, possible within a psychoanalytic theorisation, and they do occur in Highsmith's novels, Lacan stresses the *impossibility* of the sexual *relation*ship as such' (135). What Peters fails to point out, is that Kierkegaard's Christian notion of love differs fundamentally from Lacan's claim that 'love is a form of suicide' (74), 'a drive inherently attached to the death drive' (115). In Lacan's atheist theory God is relegated to the unconscious, the sinthome. Love as transcendence does not exist. It would have been helpful if Peters had pointed out that one allusion of the 'sinthome' is to Saint Thomas, the doubting apostle. While it is true that Lacan's theory and Highsmith's work thus remain in the bleakness of the here and now—and like Saint Thomas doubt transcendence, Peters' attempt to displace the transcendent dimension of Kierkegaard's ethical act into the world of Highsmith's suffering anti-heroes is unconvincing. Her 'impressive range of secondary material', as the blurb on the back of her book has it, is unfortunately too narrowly psychoanalytical to recognize the error. While Peters' reading offers a fresh and valuable perspective on Highsmith's work, it ultimately fails to convince any but the most devout, already convinced, Lacanians.

Daniel Cojocaru
University of Zurich

doi:10.1093/notesj/gjt142

Advance Access publication 3 July, 2013