

The Talented Mister Ripley - The Crow : why some remakes don't work.

A single story can evolve into multiple compelling narratives, each offering a unique lens on its themes and characters. I am compelled, after watching the 2024's movie *The Crow*, to speak about why sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. I'll compare this with the title character in Patricia Highsmith's 1955 crime novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

The Crow is a comic book character created in the late 1980s. It was made into an epic movie in 1994 starring Brandon Lee who tragically died while this was being filmed. I grew up watching Bruce Lee movies so while the younger wasn't all that well known, his passing was monumental. And this was pre-social media!

The Crow (1994) is a hauntingly atmospheric film that weaves together themes of love, vengeance, and redemption within a gothic, urban landscape. Set in a decaying, rain-soaked city, the story follows Eric Draven, a musician who is brutally murdered alongside his fiancée on the eve of their wedding. One year later, Eric is resurrected by a mysterious crow, serving as a guide and symbol of his newfound power to seek vengeance against those who wronged him. The film's aesthetic, characterized by its dark, brooding visuals and stylized violence, complements its exploration of grief and the supernatural. The relentless pursuit of justice by Eric, who teeters between life and death, creates a narrative that is both tragic and cathartic.

At the heart of *The Crow* is the enduring love between Eric and his fiancée, a love that transcends death and fuels his quest for retribution. Brandon Lee's portrayal of Eric Draven is iconic, imbuing the character with a sense of both sorrow and resolve. The film's atmosphere is enhanced by its moody soundtrack, featuring a mix of alternative rock and melancholic ballads that echo the film's themes. Director Alex Proyas crafts a world that is both beautiful and menacing, where the lines between the living and the dead are blurred. *The Crow* remains a cult classic, not only for its compelling narrative and striking visuals but also for its meditation on loss and the desire for justice in a world overshadowed by darkness.

I'll just say this: this new 2024 movie sucks. It got a 1/5 stars from [The Guardian](#) and I feel like writing a letter to the Editor asking if that is because they couldn't give zero stars.

So why didn't this remake work?

I felt like it was a series of visuals of the main tattooed character finding Matrix style leather jackets and then a set of stairs to walk either up in down in the pouring rain whilst a crow flies onto his shoulder. The characters were paper thin, much thinner than even those from the original comic book. None of the original panache was there and the love story was, well, insulting to Aphrodite. I mentioned to my friend on the way to the theatre that I hoped it wasn't a remake where they take the story and add a bunch of computerized graphics in the hopes that this will distract the audience. It was the under-attention to the role of the characters that made this movie just not work.

So when does it work? It ironically works in movies when you focus on character, not just visuals.

[Alain Delon](#) passed away a few weeks ago. I had just watched him in [Le samourai](#) from 1967 so when I read his obituary I also learned that he played Tom Ripley, the main protagonist of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the 1955 crime novel of the same name.

Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a masterful exploration of identity, deception, and the dark allure of ambition. The novel follows Tom Ripley, a young man with a murky past and a talent for mimicry, as he is sent to Europe by a wealthy businessman to retrieve his wayward son, Dickie Greenleaf. What begins as a seemingly straightforward task quickly unravels into a chilling tale of obsession and murder. Highsmith delves deep into Tom's psyche, revealing his yearning for wealth and status, as well as his envy of Dickie's carefree lifestyle. Tom's desire to become someone else—someone better—drives the narrative forward, creating an atmosphere of escalating tension and moral ambiguity.

Highsmith's portrayal of Tom Ripley is both unsettling and fascinating. She crafts a character who is simultaneously repulsive and sympathetic, a man who commits heinous acts yet remains strangely relatable. Tom's ability to deceive those around him—and even himself—underscores the

novel's exploration of identity as a fluid and constructed concept. Highsmith skillfully blurs the lines between reality and illusion, drawing readers into Tom's increasingly elaborate web of lies. The novel's tension is heightened by the luxurious and picturesque settings of Italy, from the vibrant streets of Rome to the serene coastal towns, which contrast sharply with the dark and twisted inner world of its protagonist.

The novel's enduring appeal lies in its exploration of the human capacity for self-reinvention and the lengths to which one might go to escape mediocrity. Highsmith raises questions about the nature of morality, the consequences of unchecked ambition, and the fragility of identity. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is not just a psychological thriller; it is a profound commentary on the darker aspects of human nature. Through Tom Ripley's journey, set against the backdrop of Italy's sun-drenched landscapes and opulent villas, Highsmith invites readers to confront the unsettling reality that beneath the veneer of civility and success, there may lie a dangerous and insatiable hunger for more.

The Talented Mr. Ripley has inspired several adaptations, each offering a unique portrayal of the enigmatic Tom Ripley, whose character serves as the linchpin of the narrative. In the 1960 film *Purple Noon* (originally *Plein Soleil*), Alain Delon embodies Ripley with a magnetic charm and cold-blooded precision. Delon's portrayal emphasizes Ripley's calculated, almost detached nature, highlighting his ability to manipulate those around him with ease. The sun-drenched settings of Italy in *Purple Noon* contrast sharply with the darkness of Ripley's intentions, creating a visual tension that mirrors the character's inner turmoil. This adaptation captures the essence of Highsmith's novel, with Delon's Ripley as a smooth, enigmatic figure who navigates the line between ambition and amorality with chilling ease.

[Purple Noon](#) was directed by René Clément and released in 1960. It didn't make Delon a Hollywood star but it did assure his career as a successful European star (I also enjoyed Delon in the 1973 film, [No Way Out](#) a.k.a *Tony Arzenta*. The final scene in *No Way Out* on the steps of the Noto Cathedral made me think that Coppola might have been channeling this scene in the finale of *Godfather III* on the steps of the Palermo Opera House.)



Anyway... Clément's *Purple Noon* is lusciously shot across Italy and seeing this coastline and geography was eye opening compared to its (over) development today. I digress.



The 1999 adaptation, starring Matt Damon as Ripley, offers a different interpretation, focusing more on the psychological complexity of the character. Damon's Ripley is portrayed as a more vulnerable and socially awkward figure, whose deep insecurities and desire for acceptance drive his descent into deception and murder. The film lingers into Ripley's psyche, exploring his struggle with identity and the lengths he will go to in order to attain the life he covets. The Italian backdrop, while still picturesque, serves more as a reflection of Ripley's inner world—beautiful yet fraught with tension. This version is more introspective, emphasizing Ripley's internal conflicts and the tragic elements of his character.

In the 2024 Netflix miniseries, Andrew Scott takes on the role of Ripley, bringing a new dimension to the character. Scott's portrayal is nuanced, blending the charm of Delon's Ripley with the psychological depth of Damon's interpretation. The miniseries format allows for a more extended exploration of Ripley's character, offering a detailed look at his transformation from an unassuming underdog to a ruthless manipulator. Scott's Ripley is both compelling and unsettling, with the series taking full advantage of the episodic structure to build a slow-burning tension around his character.

The Italian setting, once again, provides a backdrop that is both idyllic and deceptive, mirroring Ripley's dual nature. Each adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* brings its own focus to the character, reflecting the different

facets of Highsmith's creation and the enduring intrigue of Tom Ripley. But even with these scenic vistas, they never overwhelm character.

In my recent lecture on Caravaggio, the visuals from the 2024 Netflix miniseries adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* provided a compelling context, as the series features Tom Ripley traveling through Italy to visit locations connected to the renowned artist. This cinematic journey not only enriched the discussion by illustrating the evocative landscapes and architectural settings of Caravaggio's era but also highlighted how Ripley's character navigates these spaces in search of identity and transformation. By incorporating these visuals, I tried to draw a parallel between Ripley's pursuit of his own self-reinvention and Caravaggio's profound influence on the visual culture of his time, thereby deepening the thematic exploration of both the miniseries and the artist's work. Again, this focus on character wasn't overtaken even in scenes with a Caravaggio in the background.

The Path of Humility: Caravaggio and the Crisis of the Image

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

Why is Caravaggio still so interesting?

In exploring Caravaggio's lasting impact, it's fascinating to note how his visual style has seamlessly woven its way into both cinematic and television realms. Take Martin Scorsese, for instance—his films are practically a masterclass in Caravaggio-esque chiaroscuro, where light and shadow play out like dynamic actors in their own right, infusing scenes with a palpable intensity and emotional depth like in his iconic 1973 *Mean Streets*.

Then there's *Ripley*, the recent Netflix series, where Caravaggio's influence is equally palpable.

Martin Scorsese explained that he referenced Caravaggio in *Taxi Driver* and *Mean Streets*: "It's basically *The Calling of St. Matthew* but in New York."

In *Ripley*, (set primarily in beautiful Atrani on the Amalfi Coast) the protagonist's journey through Italy becomes almost a pilgrimage through Caravaggio's canvases, with each frame echoing the artist's iconic compositions and themes. It's remarkable how these modern storytellers pay homage to Caravaggio, showcasing how his art continues to inspire and shape creative expression across different types of media.

Screenshot

In contrast to the 2024 remake of *The Crow*, which faltered due to its emphasis on CGI overstory, the various adaptations of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* have succeeded by prioritizing character depth and narrative nuance. Each film adaptation—whether featuring Alain Delon, Matt Damon, or Andrew Scott—has focused on the intricate psychological portrait of Tom Ripley, ensuring that the core

themes of identity, deception, and moral ambiguity remain central to the story. By investigating Ripley's complex character and maintaining a strong connection between narrative and character development, these adaptations have captured the essence of Highsmith's novel, demonstrating that a compelling story and rich character exploration are crucial for a successful remake. This focus on substantive storytelling over visual effects has allowed each version to bring new dimensions to Ripley's character while honouring the original narrative's power.

The irony of incorporating extensive computer graphics into a film, which is inherently a visual medium, lies in the fact that such visual enhancements often detract from the core elements of character and narrative. While CGI can create striking imagery, it paradoxically undermines the film's emotional and psychological depth by overshadowing the complexities of character development. This overemphasis on spectacle at the expense of storytelling results in a less compelling movie, revealing that the true power of cinema lies not just in its visuals but in the intricate portrayal of characters and the richness of the narrative.

Source: <https://www.idonthaveacoolname.com/the-talented-mister-ripley-the-crow-why-some-remakes-dont-work/>