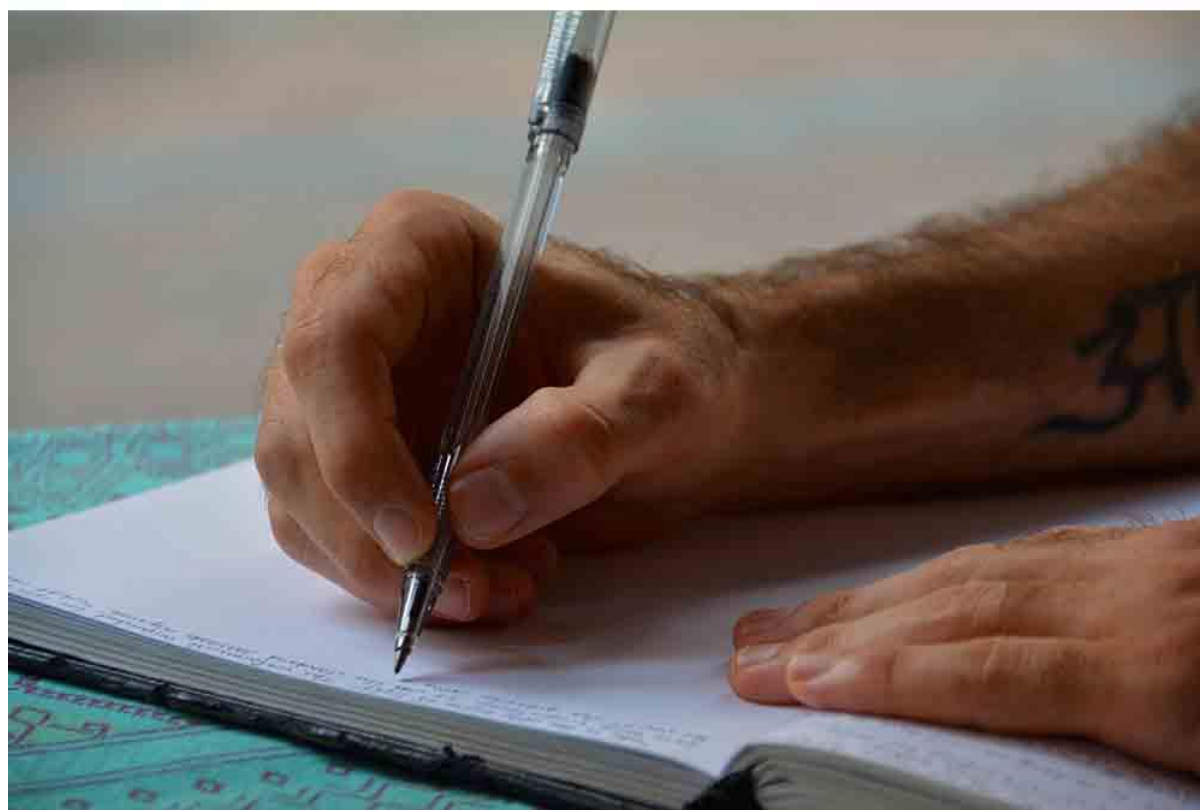


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Dr Meghna Christina Mudaliar

Assistant Professor of English Studies

School of Business Studies and Social Sciences

Christ University

Bangalore, India

meghna.mudaliar@christuniversity.in

“Now that’s The Music Talking”: Musical Narratology, Fetishistic Emblems

And Authentic Self-Representation in Anthony Minghella’s *The Talented Mr Ripley*

One of the many ways in which Anthony Minghella explores emotions and character motivations is by employing music as a significant subtextual and diegetic tool that creates a paralinguistic vision of personal spaces and attractions. *The Talented Mr Ripley* is the story of a young man who is driven by his belief that it is ‘better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody’ (Minghella 140), and whose tragic desire to authenticate his life by impersonating others ultimately leaves him ‘alone, in a nightmare of his own making’ (Minghella 142). A closeted homosexual, Ripley (Matt Damon) is drawn to two men in the film, both of whom are intrinsically associated with music.

It may be argued that the narrative structure of *The Talented Mr Ripley* is determined by a syncopated rhythm that represents Minghella’s polemical view of narrative structures in film, especially where music is concerned. The syncopations of Gabriel Yared’s musical score for the film create a palimpsestic approach to music as filling in the gaps that exist in the dialogue, with characters frequently being unable to find authentic voices and means of self-expression other than through music: “Music saturates the film, and is used by many characters to say things they cannot express themselves” (Davenport). Minghella seems to employ music

in a way that contributes intrinsically to the narrative, and unlike that of conventional cinematic narratives, *Ripley's* music often contradicts or undermines the emotional tone of the action on screen. This is often achieved by allowing the audience to infer that the film is creating a dialectical musical narratology which decentralises the protagonist's point of view, and ensures that every character comes across as meticulously researched and developed in a way that alludes to cultures and ideologies that are intrinsically larger than the scope of the film itself.

The two men that Tom Ripley is attracted to in the first and second half of the narrative respectively are Dickie Greenleaf (Jude Law), a rich American playboy who has a talent for spending his father's money, and Peter Smith-Kingsley (Jack Davenport), a young British composer and opera repetiteur who lives in Venice. Peter is homosexual and makes no secret of it, and is in fact "the most centred character in the film," who also ensures that "Ripley's pathology is not explained by his sexuality" (Minghella xi). Dickie, on the other hand, seduces Tom into a lustrous world of jazz culture and incessant holidaying; a world that Tom is irresistibly drawn to because it is one in which it is all too easy to define one's identity by money and the right affiliations. The Greenleaf name works wonders, and by meeting Dickie and his girlfriend Marge Sherwood (Gwyneth Paltrow) in Mongibello, Italy, Tom integrates himself into a world in which loyalties are ephemeral and defined by whimsical desires and popular opinions rather than authentic mediums of self-representation.

In his seminal essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno writes: "the familiarity of a piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it. To like it is almost the same thing as to recognise it" (298). Unlike Adorno, Minghella expresses no trace of disdain for popular music; he does indicate, however, that the manner in which characters relate to each other over their mutual regard (or dislike) for a particular musical genre may be a 'surrogate' for genuine interactions with each other, a directorial goal that Minghella accomplishes through the diegetic inclusion of music in his narrative. As John

Clum observes in his study of homoeroticism in cinema, “It is through music that Tom is able to ingratiate himself with jazz enthusiast Dickie and to charm classical conductor Peter” (128). The fact that music is a ‘surrogate’ for a more organic idea of an individual’s sensibility is expressed through Dickie’s developing friendship for Tom on the basis of the latter’s apparent passion for jazz, and also plays a prominent role in drawing Tom closer to Peter on the basis of Peter’s affiliation with classical music. Musical scores and instruments are among the most potent narrative devices as well as fetishistic emblems employed by Minghella in *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

Subsequently, the characters of Tom Ripley, Dickie Greenleaf and Peter Smith-Kingsley are often portrayed in interaction with musical instruments, gramophone players, record albums and musical scores, with the objects in question becoming iconic of each character’s sensibility and motivations. Tom is shown playing the piano on several occasions; he listens to jazz records and uses them as a means of integrating himself into Dickie’s life. Dickie is consistently identified with the saxophone and the drums, and Peter with the piano and the organ. Dickie’s obsession with jazz seems merely to be a superficial veneer that he uses in order to flaunt his affiliation with the post-war liberalism that ‘Il Boom’ Italy is infected with, and which manifests itself through the carpe diem syndrome represented by jazz culture. Peter, on the other hand, is deeply integrated into the world of classical music: he composes concertos, conducts the choir at “Vivaldi’s own church” (Minghella 115), and lives in an apartment full of music. (Interestingly, Peter’s apartment was created for the film on a set located in an eighteenth-century building, where the Romantic (and bisexual) poet Byron had lived at one point.) While the broader framework of shared musical tastes is what helps Tom draw close to both Dickie and Peter, it may be argued that Tom’s obsession with Dickie’s musical talents is a fetishistic representation of his yearning to possess Dickie’s life, whereas his associations with Peter may be understood in terms of a more authentic and unpremeditated

sense of similar musical inclinations and intellectual sensibilities. Tom makes a conscious effort to appreciate jazz to gain Dickie's attention; he has to make no such pretence with classical music in Peter's case, since Tom is himself a pianist.

As is evident from the first scene in which Peter Smith-Kingsley is introduced, it is the uniqueness and lustre associated with the techniques of classical music that he represents, and that Tom Ripley is instantly drawn to, despite the stressful situation he is in at the moment. The stress in question is caused by his being in the close confines of the opera house in Rome, in proximity to two sets of people who know him as different people: Marge and Peter know him as Tom Ripley, and Meredith Logue (Cate Blanchett) and her family as Dickie Greenleaf. In his director's commentary, Minghella refers to Tom and Peter's first meeting as a "parenthetical" encounter that is to be noted for future reference, an encounter "full of promise." Unlike Tom's first meeting with Dickie, which is carefully orchestrated by the former, Tom literally bumps into Peter at a time when he is least expecting to be attracted to someone: he has his hands full since he is on a date with Meredith and trying to impress her and her family by playing the role of Dickie Greenleaf to perfection.

Significantly, Tom first sees Dickie through a pair of binoculars; contrastingly, his first meeting with Peter is not mediated even by Marge, since he runs into Peter and the two exchange smiles, a few words, and gazes of mutual interest before Tom even notices that Marge is there. The meeting has a positive sense of spontaneity which Tom has lacked almost completely in the film, except for the acts of crime which he commits on an impulse (letting Herbert Greenleaf (James Rebhorn) think he went to Princeton; introducing himself to Meredith as Dickie; killing Dickie and Freddie Miles (Philip Seymour Hoffman) in moments of uncontrollable rage). The setting of the opera house perfectly complements what Tom is feeling at the moment; his authentic and unpremeditated response to Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* is in dialectical opposition to his wearing the mantle of Dickie, who "has *I hate opera*

tattooed on his chest” (Minghella 78). Of all of Tom’s acquaintances at the scene, it is the musician, Peter, who can best relate to Tom in terms of his artistic sensibility.

If Tom is irresistibly drawn to Peter because of his musical talent, Peter is also attracted to him for the same reason; the attraction between the two is portrayed as rhythmic and musical throughout. The interactions between Tom and Dickie are likewise portrayed in a syncopated narrative that prioritises aspects of character interaction relating to key moments and emotions expressed through music rather than dialogue. In his description of an integral scene in *The English Patient* that is also centred around a piece of classical music, Minghella states that the scene is “a way of making love without there being sexual content” (Bricknell 84). The same may be inferred of many of the scenes involving music in *The Talented Mr Ripley*; Minghella states in his director’s commentary that the film is “as much a musical as it is a thriller.” Two integral scenes—the jazz club in Naples and the cathedral in Venice—depict the portrayal of powerful sexual and romantic impulses through the medium of diegetic music, and both show Tom being captivated by an attractive and talented young man, albeit not the same one. Dickie is absolutely in his element in the club at Naples as he alternately sings and plays the saxophone, and his talent at both is powerfully attractive to Tom. There are two songs which Tom performs with Dickie: “Tu Vuo Fa L’Americano” and “My Funny Valentine.” The choice of both songs adds again to the sense of narrative and fetishistic integration that music has in *The Talented Mr Ripley*. “Tu Vuo Fa L’Americano” is a song about the fetishistic impulse that Italians of the period have towards anything that is American, and “My Funny Valentine” is about one man’s romantic feelings for another man.

The prevailing sexual tension between Tom and Dickie is highlighted through many scenes where music acts in ways that dialogue cannot: the kiss that Dickie bestows on Tom’s cheek at the jazz club; Tom’s utter devastation from being excluded from Dickie’s plans as Dickie and Freddie seclude themselves in a listening booth at a record store, effectively

shutting him out; and the Madonna del Mare scene in which Dickie destroys his record player, seeming to signify that the honeymoon between him and Tom is over. In keeping with Minghella's developing syncopated musical imagery, the bathtub scene in which the fully clothed Tom plays chess with a nude Dickie, and which contains the most explicit sexual undercurrents in the film, seems less sexual and fetishistic in nature than the more overarching implications of the absolute fetish that Tom develops both for the lavishness of the Greenleaf lifestyle. Nevertheless, a jazz tune plays in the background during the scene in the bath as the camera focuses on close-up views of Dickie's hands and Tom's eyes as he gazes at him; the nature of a fetish is to be fragmented and metonymic, to see a part of something as a 'surrogate' for the whole. The scene represents one way in which the film represents sexual attraction: through fragmented and even distorted images, such as Tom's reflection in the water in the tub. Another significant and dialectical way of representing attraction in the film is through wholeness and clarity, a pattern of representation that Peter becomes emblematic of. Unlike Dickie, who "only knows six songs" (Minghella 33), Peter is a pianist, a composer, and a conductor; Dickie struggles to repress his attraction towards Tom, whereas Peter is open about his sexuality from the start; Dickie cannot give Tom a compliment without the veneer of derision ("without the glasses, you're not even ugly") (Minghella 37), whereas Peter lists Tom's 'good' traits with tender and direct simplicity ("Tom is talented, Tom is tender, Tom is beautiful") (Minghella 141), even after he has just witnessed Tom's blatant betrayal of him in the form of a provocative kiss with Meredith.

One of the most critical ways in which Minghella integrates music into the narrative is to identify it closely with other emblematic features of the plot. One of the recurring images in the film is that of a dark basement. When Tom is playing Vivaldi's "Stabat Mater" on Peter's piano, the two characters have the following pivotal exchange:

RIPLEY

Whatever you do, however terrible, however hurtful, it all makes sense, doesn't it? In your head. You never meet anybody that thinks they're a bad person.

PETER

I know, but you're still tormented, you must be, you've killed someone.

RIPLEY

Don't you just take the past and put it in a room, in the basement, and lock the door and never go in there? That's what I do.

PETER

God, yes. Of course, in my case, it's probably a whole building.

RIPLEY

And then you meet someone special, and all you want to do is toss them the key, say, 'open up, step inside,' but you can't because it's dark and there are demons and if anybody saw how ugly it was...

Peter's come over, stands behind him over the piano.

PETER

Now that's the music talking. It's harder to be bleak if you're playing 'Knees Up, Mother Brown'.

He vamps this vaudeville song over Ripley's shoulder.

RIPLEY

I keep wanting to do that. Fling the door open... just... let the light in, clean everything out. If I could take a giant eraser and rub out everything, starting with myself... The thing is, Peter if... if... if...

PETER

(as Ripley falls silent)

No key, huh?

(Minghella 114-115)

Long before this critical interaction takes place, Tom is identified with a series of basements and similarly claustrophobic and confining structures. We first see him living in a squalid basement in New York, covering his head with his arms to protect himself from his neighbours' tempestuous squabbling. Herbert Greenleaf's offer of a thousand dollars for what is essentially a paid vacation to Italy becomes a heaven-sent gift for the poverty-stricken Tom. However, at the outset, Italy seems to offer little more to Tom than more basements, albeit richly embellished. The "vile" (Minghella 24) jazz club in Naples where he is "beguiled" (director's commentary) by Dickie and sings with him is set in smoky, ostensibly liberalised, cellar-like interiors. Despite the fact that Tom is entirely mesmerised by Dickie at the time, he cannot help but register that Dickie is brazenly flirting with other women, despite his seemingly permanent relationship with Marge.

Another 'basement' that Tom encounters is the interrogation room at the police station in Venice. This basement is a purgatory of sorts, since Peter is with him at the time. Significantly, Peter is acting as the interpreter during the interrogation, since Tom ostensibly knows little Italian and the inspector speaks no English at all. As Minghella has observed in his director's commentary, the scene is the first occasion that Tom and Peter have to conduct a real conversation, and it is one that they have to carry out through the 'filter' of the fact that 'they are being interrogated'. We are also aware of the fact that Tom knows more Italian than he is letting on; this suggests that he has perhaps used the 'official' excuse of needing an interpreter as a means of getting Peter to come along to give him emotional support during the interrogation. The scene is conspicuous in that it is one of the few in the film with no music. It

is also pivotal in the sense that it is the only scene in the film that openly addresses the issue of homoeroticism through dialogue:

VERRECCHIA

Il signor Ripley ha sviluppate tendenze omosessuali?

PETER

(translates for Tom)

Are you a homosexual?

(then as himself)

Interesting non-sequitur.

RIPLEY

No.

PETER

(translates for him)

No.

(as Peter, dryly)

By the way, officially, there are no Italian homosexuals. Makes Michelangelo and Leonardo very inconvenient.

RIPLEY

Tell him I have a fiancée, Dickie has a fiancée and Freddie Miles probably had a string of them.

(Minghella 110-111)

There is much coded subtextualism in this interchange, particularly in Peter's sardonic, deadpan observation that "officially, there are no Italian homosexuals." In one sense, he is commenting on the lack of genuine liberalism in the Italy of the time, but in another, he is also

letting Tom know that he understands that sexual inclinations cannot always be proclaimed ‘officially’ for fear of social and authoritarian repercussions. A little later in the scene, Peter seems on the verge of admitting to Tom that he has been harassed by the authorities for his inclinations:

RIPLEY

(outraged)

No, I did not. I did not kill Freddie Miles and then kill Dickie Greenleaf. Is he accusing me?

(Peter clearly doesn't ask)

Ask him if he's accusing me!

PETER

The way things work here, it's best to be less volatile. I've been asked these—

VERRECCHIA

Non e questo il luogo per le vostre conversazioni private!

(This is not the place for your private conversations!)

PETER

(appeasing him)

A ragione. A ragione. (You're right. You're right.)

(Minghella 112)

Peter is forced to appease both Tom and Verrecchia here, and succeeds in doing so, although Minghella portrays the character's ability to bridge differences in a way that shows the audience that this is not through a lack of opinion or concern at the way in which homosexuality is a cultural ‘non sequitur’ shut away in the basement of what Italy does not want the world to see, or to acknowledge to itself. The scene is crucial in terms of the manner

in which it employs the motif of the basement or cellar, previously used only to indicate Tom's personal sense of isolation, to refer to a cultural process whereby elements such as homosexuality are demonised and relegated to the culture's hidden cellars. In his commentary, Minghella draws attention to the fact that the activity in the police station outside is visible through the barred window behind Tom and Peter, suggesting that "nothing takes place in a room without a larger environment." Like the Madonna del Mare ceremony in which the larger cultural context of Italy at the time impinges on the narrative, this sense of the action taking place in a broader context is also indicated in the interrogation scene, which effectively signals the developing association between Tom and Peter in the context of an authoritarian setting which refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of homoeroticism. Minghella says in his commentary:

Nothing takes place in a room without a larger environment, [which] never allow[s] two people to say what they want to each other. [It's] introducing an obstacle in some way because Ripley and Peter are meeting in this scene, but they're doing so through the filter of having to be interrogated. It's about showing Peter's skill to Ripley, the skill of fluency in another language, and a kind of centred quality: that he is a homosexual, that he is perfectly at ease with being a homosexual. He's conscious of the ironies of sexuality. In a way Ripley is totally out of touch with who he is, and that's enormously impressive to Ripley.

As the two integral scenes following the interrogation reveal, Peter's music—specifically his piano and his score of Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater*, and his rehearsing the same classical hymn at the Santa Maria Della Pieta in Venice—is iconic of his role as Tom's most promising chance for redemption. Minghella also suggests that it is through Peter's music that Tom is going to find his escape route. Tom is wearing Peter's coat at the end of the film, hinting that he may be impersonating Peter at the concert in Athens. Although it is never implied that

Tom can compose music as Peter does, Peter's score must be complete (or nearly so) given the fact that he is travelling to Athens to perform in a concert, and Tom plays the piano well enough to be able to impersonate a musician of Peter's calibre for one concert. Significantly, the coat also has many connotative values in terms of its role as a costume in the film. Interestingly, Tom is already wearing Peter's coat in the scene in which they sing Gilbert and Sullivan's "We're Called Gondolieri" together, a moment in which Tom is idyllically happy, and which also contains the following exchange:

TOM

Ask me what I want to change about this moment.

PETER

I don't know. What do you want to change about this moment?

TOM

Nothing.

If Tom is wearing the coat while he is still with Peter and has absolutely no idea that he will betray him shortly, his wearing the coat may be indicative of the fact that Peter has opened him up in a way that offers him the possibility of being true to who he really is. The process of Tom's 'coming out' has already begun earlier, in the scene following the Stabat Mater sequence in which Peter tells Marge that he and Tom have "sort of found each other" (Minghella 116), and again when Tom openly tells Marge that he and Peter are taking a trip to Athens together. The interweaving narrative device of music again finds itself firmly ensconced in the portrayal of these possibilities. Tom's "Ask me what I want to change" and Peter's response echo a previous exchange between Tom and Dickie:

DICKIE

Ask me the name of my sailboat.

RIPLEY

I don't know. What's the name of your sailboat?

DICKIE

Bird!

(Minghella 24)

Dickie's homage to Charlie 'Bird' Parker as an authentic representative of jazz techniques forms a narrative context that allows Tom to befriend him through the shared value of musical appreciation for the same genre, just as Tom's moment with Peter on the *Hellenes* is defined by the inclusion of the song from Gilbert and Sullivan.

Music also comes to be identified quite closely with costumes. As Sarah Street observes in her study of costume in cinema, costumes in *The Talented Mr Ripley* are resonant of Minghella's contextual use of music: "Unlike *Plein Soleil* [Rene Clement's 1960 adaptation of the same novel], in which the music is non-diegetic and used to create suspense, the music in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is diegetic" (47). The significance of costumes enhancing the diegetic use of music can be observed through two integral scenes in which music is implemented in improvised and flippant tones. Firstly, there is the scene in which Tom sings along to Bing Crosby's "May I?," which also alludes to his yearning for Dickie and his glamorous life. Being caught by Dickie while trouserless and prancing in his room is utterly humiliating to Ripley, not least because Dickie is quick to tell Freddie Miles, whom Ripley loathes, about the incident. Tom's singing along to the song while partially dressed in Dickie's clothes seems to suggest that despite his yearnings, he is never going to get quite what he wants with Dickie. This scene may be compared to the scene in which the happy Tom and Peter sing a few bars from Gilbert and Sullivan while they are arm-in-arm on the deck of the *Hellenes*, and where Tom is wearing the coat we have seen Peter wearing earlier. There are many aspects from which both scenes may be contrasted: Peter does not mind Tom acting 'silly', and in fact joins in with him; he

does not mind Tom wearing his clothes; and, perhaps most importantly, Tom has no qualms about touching Peter physically—he is seen playfully pulling the hood of Peter’s coat over his head.

Peter is often dressed in black, the colour being “a signifier of the fashionable art-world of the 1950s,” but “also a portent of tragedy” (Street 47). Also, the fact that Tom dresses much more like Peter after his arrival in Venice suggests that they are in harmony with each other:

Their similar costuming, in casual, black sweaters, indicates their compatibility and the possibility of Tom carving out a new, confident and open identity as himself rather than as a ‘fake’ Dickie. With Peter there is no need for Tom to wear elaborate, initialled clothing to feel secure. The stark minimalism of their dress contrasts with Tom’s previous outfits. (Street 47)

There is also, of course, the underlying subversion of the veneer of happiness in the scene on the deck of the *Hellenes*, since the audience is aware of Tom’s chameleon-like nature, and of the danger that Peter is in. The iconic use of costumes is in fact brought full circle with Tom wearing Peter’s coat. If Tom’s dressing up in Dickie’s clothes may be seen as indicative of his desire to penetrate Dickie’s life by literally getting into his clothes, then Dickie’s somewhat extreme reaction to seeing Tom in his clothes may be seen as suggestive of his fear of having his identity undermined by his association with Tom. Peter, on the other hand, is happy to let Tom wear his coat, suggesting that he is well aware of Tom’s desire to gain access to his life, and that he is openly welcoming of Tom.

Through Tom’s yearnings for Dickie and Peter, Minghella also seems to address the ubiquitous longing that individuals have to authenticate their identities by approval and validation through others. With both Dickie and Peter, Tom reveals that he cannot be Tom Ripley unless someone else authenticates his existence. By not accepting Tom for who he is, Dickie forces him into a situation where he has to fight for his life, and finally to emerge from

the encounter as Dickie Greenleaf. Freddie's murder forces Tom even further into the game, when he is forced to masquerade as both Dickie and Tom. With Peter at the end of the film, Tom is brought to a point where his lover is the only one on the ship who knows him as Tom Ripley; Peter must die, and the 'authentic' Tom Ripley must die with him. Tom and Peter's similarity in terms of clothes and musical inclinations seems to indicate that Peter is in some ways an idealised version of Tom himself, refined to a clarity that Tom himself does not possess: Peter is a gifted musician, he is good-looking but unassuming, he is never ruffled by adversity, he is "the only character in the film who is comfortable in their own skin" (Davenport)—qualities that Tom himself could easily possess if he were not consumed by the tragic desire to authenticate his existence through the approval of others.

Music is the channel through which Tom finds his way into both Dickie's and Peter's lives. At first glance, it seems as if both characters are absolutely antithetical to each other; Dickie is clad only in a bathing suit when we first see him sprawled on the beach, whereas Peter is wearing a tuxedo when he is first introduced in the formal environs of the opera house. The emerging dialectic between the two seems to gain credence through the striking dissimilarities between jazz and classical music. Jazz and classical music seem contrasting at first, but are then revealed to be different only in degree: Minghella observes that the ostensible juxtaposition between "the extemporising of jazz versus the formalities of classical music" is undermined in the film by the "parenthetical notion that classical music is essentially a much more sophisticated form of extemporising—that Bach's thirty-two variations on the Goldberg aria was a form of early jazz" (Bricknell 123). The diegetic implementation of music into the film's narrative creates a continual analogy between Ripley's ability to pick up music and his ability to impersonate others; his imitation of Chet Baker while singing 'My Funny Valentine' foreshadows the way in which he later convincingly impersonates Dickie. Similarly, Tom's interactions with classical music are also portrayed in strikingly diegetic terms: at the outset of

the narrative, he is making a living as a men's room attendant in a patrician New York concert hall; later, he plays Bach in his own apartment and Vivaldi in Peter's, and watches Peter rehearse in the organ loft at the Pieta, the purest setting possible, where the tragic end of their relationship is foreshadowed by the inherent moment of grief expressed in the Stabat Mater, even as the two young men share a moment of communion. Minghella observes:

If Ripley is blessed and cursed by one thing, it is his ability to turn on a dime, to reel off the more elaborate and plausible riffs of fantasy. In identifying this, the importance of music grew in my mind, replacing the more literary motif of painting in the novel. Music for period, music for place, music for argument. And so the screenplay also became a kind of libretto, working out relationships in musical terms, pitting Dickie's identification with jazz, its mantra of freedom and existentialism, against Ripley's formal classicism and asserting that, just as in music, where truly great extemporising begins with Bach and Mozart, so it is Ripley who proves to be the more genuine improviser. (Minghella xiii)

The relationship between jazz and classical music is not merely a dialectical one. Bach is one of the earliest improvisers when it comes to seminal breakthroughs in the musical tradition. It is only through the acceptance of improvised strategies and techniques into the mainstream of musical compositions that composers such as Bach and Vivaldi are seen today to be representative of 'classical' models. In other words, the classical is unexpected and primal when it first comes into being; the very freshness and lustre that it brings to the canon is what ultimately integrates it into canonical structures. If jazz ultimately aspires to reach the level of improvisation achieved by classical music, then Ripley's attraction to Dickie may also be seen as an unbridled sexual awakening that finds true fulfilment in his more mature and evolved relationship with Peter. One of the most significant ways in which Minghella establishes this is to recreate Vivaldi's Stabat Mater in the integral scene which shows Tom watching Peter

rehearse the classical hymn at the Santa Maria Della Pieta, the cathedral at the Bridge of Sighs (so named by Byron) in Venice. Minghella says of the scene in his director's commentary:

This is Ripley sensing that Peter might be somebody who could listen to him, he could open up to—a real meeting of minds, a real love for the same kind of music. Now a kind of innocence is restored, and I thought of Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater* and the innocence of a child, because it's almost as if temporarily the slate is wiped clean for Ripley and he can go back to being Tom Ripley and be accepted by somebody for who Ripley is, for who he is, not for who he thinks he ought to be. There's no need to be somebody different with this man who seems to take Ripley on his own terms and is so full of promise.

Through Peter, Minghella's romanticist vision seeks to liberate classicism from the mantle of orthodoxy by reimagining it in a way that highlights the nature of its sensibility and techniques. Two elements of Minghella's version of the *Stabat Mater* stand out vividly in terms of his romantic imagination. Firstly, the soprano part of the *Stabat Mater* is sung by a young boy rather than a mature singer, establishing the fact that Tom is experiencing a 'return to innocence' and the possibility of redemption through his escalating love for Peter and through Peter's open acceptance of him. Secondly, Peter is not only conducting the orchestra but also accompanying it, by playing the organ himself; he is not only the orchestrator, but also one of the musicians contributing to the diegetic portrayal of the piece. Peter's non-hegemonic identification with what he does is so complete that it is difficult to distinguish the man from the music, and this portrayal of an alluring and earnest man 'full of promise' is entirely different from that of the high-spirited, impetuous Dickie in one sense; but in another, both men have similar effects on Tom's yearning to be loved, to not be alone. Tragically, Peter does nothing to prevent Tom from being close to him; very unlike Dickie, who makes every effort to push

Tom away after he has encouraged him to become a part of his life; both young men end up losing their lives at Tom's hands, another tragic factor that they have in common.

While Dickie's obsession with jazz represents a fetishistic yearning to be associated with contemporary cultural fashions, he is in fact the one who desires a car and an icebox and a conventional marriage, and Tom is the truly liberal one in his ability to improvise and to candidly acknowledge his feelings for Dickie. Jazz is the mediating force between Dickie and Tom, since Dickie assumes that Tom's apparent fascination with jazz is a surrogate for Tom himself. With Peter there is no such sense of fetishistic surrogacy: although Tom and Peter connect at the level of being classical musicians, Tom is genuinely involved with classical music and loves the genre with a passion; it is intrinsic to his identity, unlike his adopted love of jazz. By highlighting the fact that the ability to successfully improvise is a common facet of both jazz and classical music, Minghella draws attention to the underlying similarities between cultural assumptions that are ostensibly disparate. In its candid portrayal of the individual's struggle for authentic forms of self-representation and the authoritarian tendencies of cultures to repress elements such as poverty and homosexuality, *The Talented Mr Ripley* is "a meditation on how social exclusion can corrupt a sense of self" (Davenport). Minghella's non-partisan narrative structure employs music to suggest that the fetishistic element in sexuality may perhaps be a surrogate for more classicised and authentic forms of human interaction.

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