

### Elements of Crime Writing: Unseen extract

Explore the significance of crime elements in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Highsmith has shaped meanings.

[25 marks]

This extract is taken from the middle of Patricia Highsmith's novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (published in 1956). Tom Ripley has decided to murder his friend Dickie Greenleaf to assume his personality and continue his life of wealth and luxury. They are sailing off the Italian coast in a small motor boat.

Tom glanced at the land. San Remo was a blur of chalky white and pink. He picked up the oar, as casually as if he were playing with it between his knees, and when Dickie was shoving his trousers down, Tom lifted the oar and came down with it on top of Dickie's head.

'Hey!' Dickie yelled, scowling, sliding half off the wooden seat. His pale brows lifted in groggy surprise.

Tom stood up and brought the oar down again, sharply, all his strength released like the snap of a rubber band.

'For God's sake!' Dickie mumbled, glowering, fierce, though the blue eyes wobbled, losing consciousness.

Tom swung a left-handed blow with the oar against the side of Dickie's head. The edge of the oar cut a dull gash that filled with a line of blood as Tom watched. Dickie was on the bottom of the boat, twisted, twisting. Dickie gave a groaning roar of protest that frightened Tom with its loudness and its strength. Tom hit him in the side of the neck, three times, chopping strokes with the edge of the oar, as if the oar were an axe and Dickie's neck a tree. The boat rocked, and water splashed over his foot that was braced on the gunwale. He sliced at Dickie's forehead, and a broad patch of blood came slowly where the oar had scraped. For an instant Tom was aware of tiring as he raised and swung, and still Dickie's hands slid towards him on the bottom of the bottom of the boat. Dickie's long legs straightened to thrust him forward. Tom got a bayonet grip on the oar and plunged its handle into Dickie's side. Then the prostrate body relaxed, limp and still. Tom straightened, getting his breath back painfully. He looked around him. There were no boats, nothing, except far, far away a little white spot creeping from right to left a speeding motor boat heading for the shore. He stopped and yanked at Dickie's green ring. He pocketed it. The other ring was tighter, but it came off, over the bleeding scuffed knuckle. He looked in the trouser pockets. French and Italian coins. He left them. He took a keychain with three keys. Then he picked up Dickie's jacket and took Marge's cologne package out of the pocket. Cigarettes and Dickie's silver lighter, a pencil stub, the alligator wallet and several little cards in the inside breast pocket. Tom stuffed it all into his own corduroy jacket. Then he reached for the rope that was tumbled over the white cement weight. The end of the rope was tied to the metal ring at the prow. Tom tried to untie it. It was a hellish, water-soaked, immovable knot that must have been there for years. He banged at it with his fist. He had to have a knife.

He looked at Dickie. Was he dead? Tom crouched in the narrowing prow of the boat, watching Dickie for a sign of life. He was afraid to touch him, afraid to touch his chest or his wrist to feel a pulse. Tom turned and yanked at the rope frenziedly, until he realised that he was only making it tighter.

His cigarette lighter. He fumbled for it in the pocket of his trousers on the bottom of the boat. He lighted it, then held a dry portion of the rope over its flame. The rope was about an inch and a half thick. It was slow, very slow, and Tom used the minutes to look around him again. Would the Italian with the boats be able to see him at this distance? The hard grey rope refused to catch fire, only glowed and smoked a little, slowly parting, strand by strand. Tom yanked it, and his lighter went out. He lighted it again, and kept on pulling at the rope. When it parted, he looped it four times around Dickie's bare ankles before he had time to feel afraid, and tied a huge, clumsy knot, overdoing it to make sure it would not come undone, because he was not very good at tying knots. He estimated the rope to be about thirty-five or forty feet long. He began to feel cooler, and smooth and methodical. The cement weight should be just enough to hold a body down, he thought. The body might drift a little, but it would never come up to the surface.

Tom threw the weight over. It made a *ker-plung* and sank through the transparent water with a wake of bubbles, disappeared, and sank and sank until the rope drew taut on Dickie's ankles, and by that time Tom had lifted the ankles over the side and was pulling now at an arm to lift the heaviest part, the shoulders, over the gunwale. Dickie's limp hand was warm and clumsy. The shoulders stayed on the bottom of the boat, and when he pulled, the arm seemed to stretch like rubber, and the body not to rise at all. Tom got down on one knee and tried to heave him out over the side. It made the boat rock. He had forgotten the water. It was the only thing that scared him. He would have to get him out over the stern, he thought, because the stern was lower in the water. He pulled the limp body towards the stern, sliding the rope along the gunwale. He could tell from the buoyancy of the weight in the water that the weight had not touched the bottom. Now he began with Dickie's head and shoulders, turned Dickie's body on its belly and pushed him out little by little. Dickie's head was in the water, the gunwale cutting across his waist, and now the legs were in a dead weight, as his shoulders had done, as if they were magnetized to the boat bottom. Tom took a deep breath and heaved. Dickie went over...