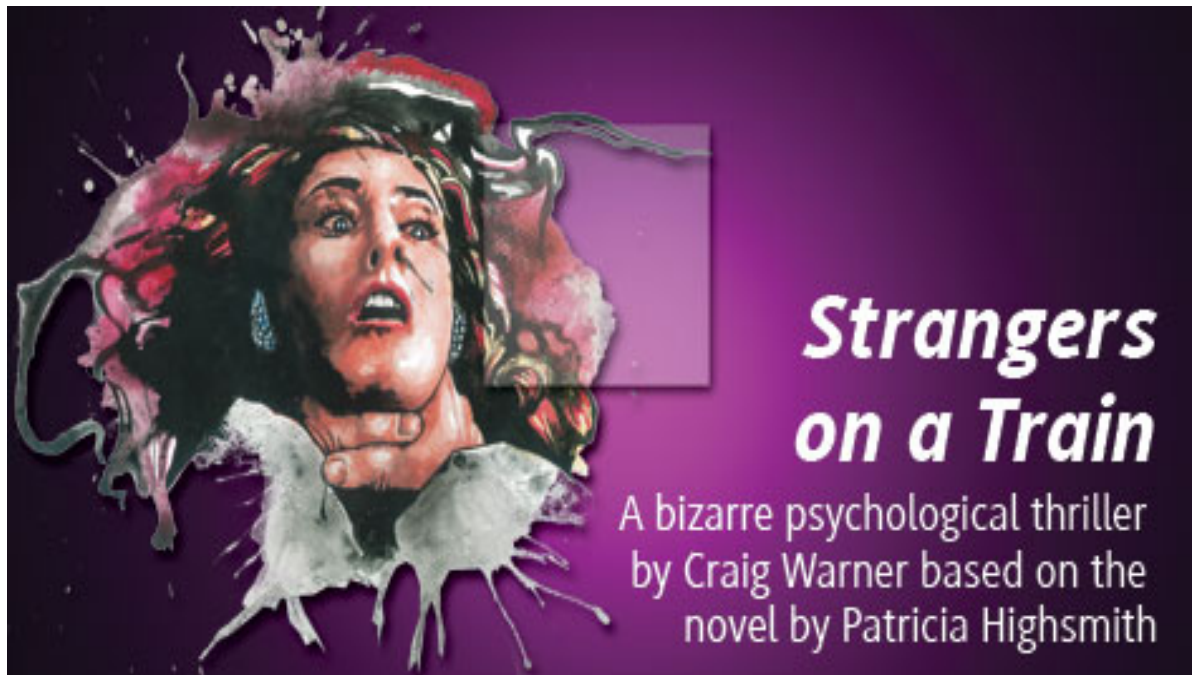


The English Theatre Frankfurt

presents



**Teacher's Support Pack
(Comprehensive Version)**

2014

Arbeitsmaterialien für den Englisch - Unterricht
(Oberstufe Gymnasium)

"The human soul can be likened to a pair of horses, one white, one black, each pulling their driver toward a different path. The white horse is good, the black, base; and the driver, through his days on earth, labours ever to steer the two horses on a single road."

Guy Haines in *Strangers on a Train*
(Act I, Sc.1, by Craig Warner) quoting Plato
see Phaedrus 246a-254e

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A note for usage of this material:

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wenden Sie sich bitte per Email an uns: michael.gonszar@english-theatre.de

Das Team von T.I.E.S (Theatre in Education Service) wünscht Ihnen viel Erfolg bei der Arbeit mit dem Teacher's Support Pack. Wir freuen uns auf einen Aufführungsbesuch mit Ihrer Lerngruppe.

Lea Dunbar, Dr. Karl Guttzeit, Michael Gonszar



Scene taken from the Hitchcock film 1951

“Strangers on a Train” (1950) is a novel by Patricia Highsmith which has been skillfully adapted by Craig Warner and turned into a theatre play. It was first produced at the Gateway Theatre, Chester, 29 March 1996.

1. Plot summary

America in the 1950s. Two young strangers meet in the dining-car of a train: Guy Haines, a successful architect, heading to his hometown in Texas from New York, where he hopes to finally settle an ongoing divorce with his unfaithful wife, and Charles Bruno, a charming but spoilt mother's boy with a liking for drink.

Bruno immediately takes a liking to Guy and begins conversing with him. They talk about their lives. Bruno asks Guy if he has ever considered killing anyone and says that he would be happy to swap murders – Bruno will kill Guy's inconsiderate, unfaithful wife, and in return, Guy will kill Bruno's much-hated father (the perfect murder).

Amused, Guy parts from Bruno never imagining he will see him again or that Bruno was serious and when he finally kills Guy's wife, Miriam, he expects Guy to fulfil his part of the proposition but he rejects.

Bruno then begins calling, writing, and visiting Guy, telling Guy that he is responsible for Guy's freedom and that Guy now owes him. After sending malicious letters to business associates and to Anne, Guy's fiancée, Bruno finally convinces Guy to kill Bruno's father.

An official investigation ensues. Guy is plagued with nightmares and guilt and Bruno begins experiencing the same paranoid psychosis. Bruno's heavy drinking doesn't help, either. Things only get worse when Gerard, a private detective and friend of the Bruno family, is assigned to investigate the killing of Bruno's father. He begins finding links between Bruno and Guy, from the train ride to phone calls and the murder of Miriam and Bruno's father within a few months.

Guy, meanwhile, gets married and Bruno shows up for the wedding party to be part of the happy event even though he had promised not to contact Guy again. While Guy takes leave for an important job in Canada, Bruno goes to the Haines' house and is invited in by Anne, who still doesn't know about the murder plot. He is even allowed to stay overnight. Returning home the next day, Guy is shocked to find Bruno there. Guy learns from Bruno that Gerard will soon arrive to ask him some questions about their connection. The detective arrives and Bruno hides. But he leaves some clues behind which help Gerard to get a complete picture of the murder plot.

Later at Bruno's house Gerard confronts him with the true story but does not turn him in to the police nor will he make any information on Guy public. Even Bruno's mother finds out about what her son did and leaves him for good.

Guy is the only person Bruno has left to turn to. They meet again but Guy denies him friendship until the end and Bruno shoots himself with the gun used to kill his father. Seeing Bruno die, Guy feels sorry and cries heavily. But Anne, who by then has read her husband's confession in a letter to her, takes him by the hand and leads him off.

2. The characters

Charles Bruno, a "spoilt mother's boy", a modern dandy and alcoholic; a man living off his rich father's assets, which are allocated to him by paternal mercy.

Guy Daniel Haines, an ambitious architect from Metcalf, Texas, married to Miriam.

Elsie Bruno, Charles Bruno's mother and wife to Sam Bruno.

Anne Faulkner, Guy's fiancée, later his wife

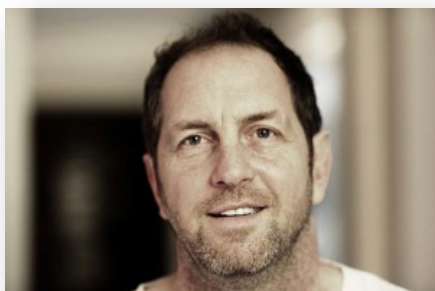
Frank Myers, Guy's friend, fellow architect, who shares the same office with Guy.

Robert Treacher, a Canadian, Guy's college roommate and long-time friend.

Arthur Gerard, a former police officer turned private eye; Sam Bruno's friend, who has also been his client.

3. The author(s)

3.1.1 Craig Warner



Craig Warner is a playwright and screenwriter who lives and works in Suffolk, England.

He was born in Hollywood in 1964, although for him it wasn't 'Hollywood', as in the near-mythic entertainment capital, when he was growing up. 'It was just home.' His first thought was that he would be an actor. His next was that he would be a playwright, and it was that second idea that stuck. At 17 he wrote his first play, influenced by Edward Albee, and 'decided to commit to being a

playwright. I've remained a playwright for 32 years.' After high school he moved to New York and then London, which offered a thriving pub theatre scene, and a market for radio plays.

He wrote *The Queen's Sister* for Channel 4, which was nominated for several BAFTA awards (including Best Single Drama), *Maxwell* for BBC2, which starred David Suchet as Robert Maxwell, and *The Last Days of Lehman Brothers*, for which he was longlisted for a BAFTA Craft Award for Best Writer, and which won him the award for Best Writer at the Seoul International Drama Awards in South Korea, 2010. He wrote the mini-series *Julius Caesar* for Warner Bros., which was nominated for a Writers Guild Award for Best Original Long-Form Drama, and he performed an extensive uncredited rewrite on *The Mists of Avalon*, also for Warner Bros., which was nominated for a Writers Guild Award and nine Emmys, including Best Mini-series.

Craig Warner started out writing for the theatre and for radio. His first radio play for BBC Radio 4, *Great Men of Music*, was performed by Philip Davis and was included in Radio 4's first Young Playwrights Festival. His second play *By Where the Old Shed Used to Be*, with Miranda Richardson, won the Giles Cooper Award for Best Radio Plays of the Year, and it was included in the volume of winners for 1989, published by Methuen. His play *Figure With Meat* also won a Giles Cooper Award and was published in the Methuen volume of 1991. Craig Warner is the award's youngest ever winner, having received it for the first time when he was 24.

In 1995 he acquired the stage rights to Patricia Highsmith's novel *Strangers on a Train*, and his theatre version of that title has had a number of successful productions worldwide. The acting edition is published by Samuel French.

Craig Warner is also a composer and has written music and songs for a number of his works, including a full-length musical for BBC Radio 3.

3.1.2 From Script to Prose – A Profile of Craig Warner

Current MA in Creative Writing student [Paula Coccozza](#) profiles Craig Warner, scriptwriter, UEA Masters student and author of current West End Hit **Strangers on a Train**.

Craig Warner is a busy man. His latest play, **Strangers On A Train**, adapted from the novel of the same name by Patricia Highsmith, is currently showing at the Gielgud Theatre in the West End. And in the new year he will embark upon the final semester of his MA in creative writing (prose) at the University of East Anglia. The last few months have been spent to-ing and fro-ing between his Suffolk home and London, between work on the MA and finishing touches to the play.

The Daily Telegraph described the play as an 'ingenious, grippingly nasty pleasure'. Henry Hitchings in the Evening Standard says it is 'as brilliant as any of Alfred Hitchcock's movies, a thriller that is unsettling and at the same time seductive'.

However Warner is keen to emphasise that the play is an adaptation of Highsmith's novel, and not of Hitchcock's film. 'It's disappointing to me that people are so distracted by the fact that there was another work created out of this book, which was so famous. I can't imagine that if they would have that reaction if they had read the book,' he says. 'The book is morally

complex in a way that Hitchcock's film isn't at all. It's about spiritual decay. The film and the novel couldn't be more different.'

The play at the Gielgud is a new work, but Warner's fascination with **Strangers on a Train** the novel began many years ago, after he obtained the adaptation rights to it in 1995. He wrote an early play of it for radio and then stage. So how does the process of adaptation work; surely he must have re-read Highsmith's novel at least a dozen times? 'I loved the novel when I read it initially and first worked with it,' he says. 'But I see the play as a work in its own right. Once it became its own object I continued to work on it on its own terms.' The play became a new original text that he refined and developed, distinct from the novel that first gave it life. 'It has its own logic and really its own characters,' Warner says. The show at the Gielgud is its ultimate, fully developed expression.

For Warner, writing prose promises a similar freedom and self-direction, to writing plays. But it has brought unexpected challenges. Kath Mattock, who produced **The Queen's Sister** – the fictionalised account of the life of Princess Margaret which Warner wrote for Channel 4 – knows first-hand Warner's strengths as a screenwriter. 'His characters always have a true heart – and even though the world of the screenplay is often not wholly naturalistic Craig is able to make both become one,' she comments. 'He is very inventive with form and always surprises in the right way. He is confident to take bold choices – so there is colour and life – without undermining the integrity.'

From: <http://www.newwriting.net/writing/scriptwriting/from-script-to-prose-an-interview-with-craig-warner/>. Upload 18-12-2013.

3.2 Patricia Highsmith



On the 9th January 1921 crime novelist **Patricia Highsmith** was born in Forth Worth, Texas. Highsmith, who wrote some 20 novels and seven short story collections, examined the darkest sides of human nature and frequently portrayed a world chillingly free of morality or consequences.

Highsmith had an unhappy childhood. Her parents separated several months before her birth, and she spent her earliest years with her maternal grandmother, who taught her to read before she was two years old. Her mother remarried and brought her to New York when the girl was about six. Highsmith's mother and stepfather frequently fought bitterly, and she developed a strong dislike for both.

Highsmith began writing chilling stories in high school: One story, about a murderous nanny, was rejected by her high school's literary magazine. She studied English at Barnard College, then took a job writing comic book scripts. Her first novel, *Strangers on a Train*, was rejected by six publishers before appearing in print in 1950. Alfred Hitchcock directed a 1951 film version of the movie, scripted by Raymond Chandler. Although Highsmith was paid only \$7,000 for the film rights, it was enough to support her writing full time.

As a writer, Highsmith was far more interested in the psychology of her characters than she was in writing typical detective stories. In fact, her favorite character, charming murderer

Tom Ripley, is never caught and indeed finds fortune and prosperity from his string of murders. Ripley first appeared in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1957) and starred in four more novels, the last of which, *Ripley Under Water*, was published in 1991.

Highsmith spent most of her adult life living abroad, eventually settling in Switzerland after stints in the United Kingdom, Italy, and France. She never married and lived alone, except for her many cats. An animal lover, she wrote an entire short story collection, *The Animal Lover's Book of Beastly Murders* (1975), in which animals avenge themselves on their human owners. Highsmith died in Switzerland at the age of 74.

4. Tackling the script

4.1. Act I, Scene 1

Here is an excerpt from the original play script. Find a list of suggested activities below.

ACT I

SCENE I

The dining-car of a train

Guy is at a table, reading a book, an empty glass in front of him. Other than that, the car is empty

Bruno appears at one end of the aisle and slowly walks along it. He stops near Guy and stares out the window. He finishes what's in his glass, and fills it from a silver hip flask he has in his pocket. He half-turns to Guy

Bruno You want a drink?

Guy I've got one here.

Bruno I find alcohol enhances travelling. What are you reading?

Guy Plato.

Bruno Wow!

Guy I just grabbed it off the shelf on my way out the door. I didn't think I'd actually read it.

Bruno I never read. I'd rather live the story than read about it. No offence to people who read! I'm sure some people read *and* live, and I'll bet you're one of them.

Guy What makes you so sure?

Bruno You've got a spark. I can spot a spark a mile off.

Guy laughs. Bruno sits

(Offering the flask) Here. Have a drink.

Guy No, really.

Bruno Do you like the flask? My mother gave it to me when I turned eighteen. It's got grapes and apples engraved on it. I understand the grapes — they mean wine, but I don't know why the apples are there. Do you?

Guy No.

Bruno Maybe for everything you understand there should be something else you don't. *(He drinks)* My name is Charles Bruno.

Guy Guy Haines.

Bruno There. We've introduced ourselves. Now we're not strangers. You can drink with me now.

Bruno sets the flask on the table and slides it over to Guy. Guy hesitates, then pours Scotch into his glass

Where are you going?

Guy Metcalf, Texas.

Bruno On business?

Guy says nothing

You can trust me. You'll never see me again. You can say anything you like.

Guy Where are you going?

Bruno Santa Fe.

Guy What's in Santa Fe?

Bruno Nothing really. Sometimes I go to a place just because I've never been there before. Don't you ever do that?

Guy No.

Bruno You like to stay at home.

Guy Yeah.

Bruno With your book.

Guy Yeah.

Bruno What does it say?

Guy You want me to read it to you?

Bruno Yeah.

Guy Here?

Bruno There's nobody else around. Just pick up where you left off.

Guy *(reading)* "The human soul can be likened to a pair of horses, one white, one black, each pulling their driver toward a different path. The white horse is good, the black, base; and the driver, through his days on earth, labours ever to steer the two horses on a single road."

Bruno I've said it all my life: every man's got a god and a murderer inside him, and either one of those can get let out at any time if life plays him right.

Guy I don't have a murderer in me.

Bruno You do!

Guy I can't swat a fly. It's not in my nature.

Bruno It's nothing to do with nature, every man's got them both, the good and the bad, the black horse and the white horse, your nature's just what's there on the surface! But that's what's great about being a human being, isn't it? All that stuff inside us, so much we can be capable of, and guilty of, and feel and do on this earth? I think we start out without any limits, immortal, dark black, blinding white, and as soon as we land on this earth we start to shrivel up and forget our true colours and become small and mortal and grey. Grey horses! I think that's probably the worst thing that happens to us on this earth. Don't you?

Guy *(quietly)* I do. I probably do.

Bruno What are you thinking?

Guy Aw, nothing, I —

Bruno Tell me.

Guy I have a gun.

Bruno You have a gun!

Guy *(laughing)* Not here! At home, in a drawer. I bought it when I was fifteen

with the money from my paper route. It's a little silver revolver with a short barrel and a pearl handle.

Bruno You have a gun.

Guy I never thought of it as something that could kill. I just bought it because it was beautiful.

Bruno And you've never fired it?

Guy No.

Bruno You've got to fire it!

Guy It's never been fired. That's part of its beauty.

Bruno It's a gun. It's got to be fired!

Guy What should I fire at?

Bruno That's something you'll have to figure out for yourself.

Guy laughs

You want to come to Santa Fe with me?

Guy I can't.

Bruno I've got plenty of money. I've got nothing to do till my mother gets there. You could be my guest. We could have a wild time!

Guy I've got things to do.

Bruno Like what?

Guy After I leave Metcalf I've got three days in Mexico. Then I've got to go to Palm Beach to start a job.

Bruno What kind of job?

Guy I'm building a country club.

Bruno You're an architect!

Guy Yeah.

Bruno A whole country club at your age!

Guy It might not work out.

Bruno Why not?

Guy Something's in the way.

Bruno What is? What is?

Silence

Aw, you can tell me, Guy! I'm just a stranger on the train, remember? You can say anything you like.

Silence

What's it going to be called?

Guy The Palmyra.

Bruno I'm going to join the Palmyra.

Guy Yeah?

Bruno Right now! Give me your glass! *(He pours)* To the Palmyra's first member, Charles Bruno. Clink my glass and I'll know I'm it!

Guy clinks his glass

Whoooooooooooo! You're going to be famous! We've got to do things in this life! I want to be immortal, I want to leave a trail of amazing deeds behind me, things no-one'll ever forget! So much is going to happen, I know it is, but for now I'm just waiting, waiting ...

Guy For what?

Bruno To live my life! My income was supposed to start this year, but my father won't let me have it. He's sending all my money into his own

exchequer so I don't have any more cash now than I had when I was at school.

Guy You seem to do OK.

Bruno Yeah, but it's not OK because all the pleasures get dirty coming through his hands. It's not even his money, it belongs to my mother's family! He had his name put on it when I was a kid!

Guy Why'd he do that?

Bruno He robs whoever he can! Now he says he won't give me my money because I won't work for him, but that's a lie. He's just jealous because my mom and I have such a good time. Well I don't see why a person should work if they don't have to. In my opinion, all business is legalized throat-cutting, just like marriage is legalized fornication. Am I right?

Guy laughs

And to top it all off, he plays little games with me — like sometimes when I want to go out, he locks up my car in the garage and he won't give me the keys, for no reason at all, just to keep me from having a life! He never goes out, so everybody else has to stay in too. Can you think of anything worse than that? *It makes me sick!* I tell you, it's always been their mission, the mediocre, grey horse people, to smother anyone who's got a hint of a spark in them, hasn't it? *Why?* Because they can't *be* us, so they want to *kill* us. But they can't kill us, because they can't kill, they can't know their black horse, they're grey and grey forever, so the best they can do is to try to make us grey too! Well it's not going to work. When my dad is dead, and I promise you that can't be soon enough for me, I'm going to live. And when I die... Well... *(He looks out the window)* I'm never going to die.

Bruno turns to look at Guy and their eyes meet. They watch each other for a moment

Come to Santa Fe with me.

Guy How can I do that?

Bruno Just stay on the train.

Guy I've got to go to Metcalf.

Bruno Why? You're not building something there too?

Guy Tearing something down. I'm arranging my divorce.

Bruno You're married?

Beat

Was she unfaithful?

Pause

I can tell by your silence she was. What kind of girl was she? One of those dumb southern redheads with a little-girl voice who gets married young and then finds she gets easily bored?

Guy You don't aim wide of the mark, do you?

Bruno I know that kind of woman. My father had a string of them, a string of... what's her name?

Guy Miriam.

Bruno A string of Miriams and so I know the kind of girl you mean. I know the way they smile and the way they laugh, the way they keep catching sight of themselves in the mirror, how they look when they accept a gift, how they lie underneath you like machines. I know Miriam. I know her inside and out.

Guy pours himself another Scotch

Are you going to tell me what happened?

Silence

Tell me anything you want, Guy. We don't know each other. We've never even met.

Guy My best friend Lawrence. Ha! That's what happened. My best friend Lawrence happened. I can see them together without even closing my eyes. I just think of it and the image appears in front of me, the daylight in Chicago, stripes of light from the slats of the window on her back, where her shoes are, I still remember, all framed in the doorway like a photograph, with its own colours and sounds and smells, like a horrible little work of art. I was pulled to pieces, and worse again when I got the news that it had been going on all along, and not just with Lawrence, and that everybody knew.

Bruno And you're still married to her.

Guy I didn't need to think about a divorce until now.

Bruno What's changed?

Guy She's going to have a child.

Bruno Not yours.

Guy Not mine. And you want to know the joke?

Bruno What?

Guy She wants to come to Palm Beach with me while I build the Palmyra.

Bruno Why?

Guy Because the father of her child is married and he won't be free till September.

Bruno She's going to soil the whole thing with her filthy little hands.

Guy She says if I don't take her, she's going to come anyway.

Bruno She can't build, so she has to destroy.

Guy But her powers only extend so far. If she won't see reason, I'm going to turn down the job.

Bruno She's not going to see reason.

Guy That's why I'm not getting my hopes up about doing the Palmyra.

Bruno You can't let her lose you the chance of a lifetime!

Guy What am I going to do? Making a building is a spiritual act. I can't do it with her there. I won't. Oh hell, another job like this might crop up. She's not going to see reason.

Bruno Why should she? She's not a reasonable thing. She's just a thing to be stopped.

Guy How?

Bruno You don't think you have a killer inside you? Well you should find him — and start with her.

Guy Not me!

Bruno I'll do it then, with pleasure! It would be so easy! She's not a person, she's just a thing to be stopped, just a warm thing somewhere that needs to get put out. I'll tell you what: I'll kill her for you if you kill my father for me. Is that a deal?

Guy (*laughing*) Sure!

Bruno Think about it! We swap murders, then nobody could find us, because none of the clues would make any sense! There would be no motive, we'd have alibis — you wouldn't even know when I was going to do it! Suddenly, out of the blue, it would be done, you'd be free, and nobody'd come looking for me because we're strangers, we haven't even met! What do you think, Guy? Clink my glass on it! Come on! It would be the perfect pair of murders, it would drive the cops crazy, it would be worth it just for

that, even if we didn't *know* the people we were killing, but since without these two people we're free, Guy, all the white horses and black horses in heaven and hell and everywhere in between would be stampeding by our side! Clink my glass! *Clink it!*

Guy (*laughing*) To the power and elegance of your imagination, Bruno. (*He clinks his glass*)

Bruno Charley. Please call me Charley.

The Lights cross-fade to the next scene

4.2. Activities

The opening scene: *Act I, Scene 1*

Specific activities:

1. Bruno starts conversing with Guy by asking him whether he wants a drink and shows interest in what he is reading. **In pairs find another possible start of the conversation and act out the situation. What could they be talking about?**
2. **Read the first 12 lines and work out what these lines say about the two main characters** (Bruno and Guy).
3. Bruno: "I never read. I'd rather live the story than read about it...." **What do you think about this statement? Do you agree / disagree / partially agree?**
4. Bruno asks Guy whether he likes his flask and says that his mother gave it to him when he turned 18. **Act out the situation of his 18th birthday and show possible reasons why his mother gave him this present and how Bruno reacted to that.**
5. Bruno is constantly trying to convince Guy to have a drink with him. **Discuss possible reasons for his intention.**
6. **What does Bruno's liking for a drink tell us about his character, upbringing, and family background? Give reasons for your suggestions.**
7. Bruno: "[...] I sometimes go to a place just because I've never been there before. Don't you ever do that?" **In pairs, discuss this habit. Do you have a similar habit or why do you travel to foreign places? What places are attractive to you and why? Mime and guess famous places.** Example:
Person A: miming the Eiffel Tower and a French man drinking coffee, eating baguette.
Person B: Ah, I think it's Paris.
Person A: correct. Now, it's my turn.
8. Bruno tells Guy about his belief that every person has a good and an evil side and that either side can get out any time. **Discuss in pairs: Do you agree with this idea?**
9. **Think about your own good and weaker sides. Choose a partner you trust. Let your partner guess your good and your weak sides. Discuss how to use your strong sides more and how to work more on / improve your weaker side.**
10. **Visualize good and evil character traits (draw a sketch, act out those traits with and without words)**
11. Bruno even talks about an evil side. **Mime and guess / act out possible evil sides of human nature.**

- 12. Discuss why people can turn into murderers. Act out a possible situation by showing a transformation in character.**
- 13. Bruno:** "I think we start out without any limits, immortal, dark black, blinding white, and as soon as we land on this earth we start to shrivel up and forget our true colors and become small and mortal and grey. Grey horses! I think that's probably the worst thing that happens to us on this earth." **Illustrate and explain what Bruno means by saying so. What does this tell us about his character? Do you agree with Bruno? Give an example of "grey horses". Act out two people turning into "grey horses".**
- 14. Guy** says that he bought a gun because it's beautiful. Discuss why he thinks so. How can a gun be "beautiful"? What does beauty mean to you?
- 15. Guy** tells Bruno that he is about to build a country club but that something is in the way. He can't go ahead. **In pairs, speculate what could be in his way. Visualize or act out Guy's problem and propose a possible solution.**
- 16. Bruno** says that he wants to do things in his life and become immortal. **Collect ideas what things he could be doing.**
- 17. Bruno** talks about the difficulties with his father. **Propose solutions how he could be solving these difficulties.**
- 18. When Bruno** asks Guy about his marriage he can guess that his wife was unfaithful. **Act out the situation and show how Bruno is able to make such a guess. Focus on Guy's facial expression and body language!**
- 19. After having heard about Guy's wife Bruno** says that he can imagine the kind of woman she was: "[...] I know the way they smile and the way they laugh, the way they keep catching sight of themselves in the mirror, how they look when they accept a gift, [...]" **Act out the image of a woman that Bruno has in mind. Focus on your facial expression and body language.**
- 20. Act out Guy's situation when he is being told that his wife expects a child from someone else.**
- 21. Act out the situation when Bruno proposes to swap murders. Show different ways of reacting to such a deal. (assuming it's a joke / being enthusiastic / turning it down).**
- 22. General activities:**
 - a) This is an activity to promote oral fluency practice & specific language practice at the same time. **Get the students to imagine they are strangers in a train compartment - get them sitting opposite each other in groups of four. Elicit what people usually talk about on the train - the weather, where they are going/coming from etc. Tell them you are going to give them a line to memorize & that it's secret. Give them out. Students memorize the lines and you take them back in. Then explain what they have to do - to say their lines as naturally as they can in the conversation without the others guessing it is their line. They have to direct the conversation so that they can say their line naturally, without the others noticing. The lines you give them could contain a language item that you have recently been looking at or off-the-wall sentences. At the end the students then tell each other what they thought were each other's' lines.**
 - b) **Get the students to sit opposite each other in groups of two simulating a train ride. They are pretending they are four strangers on a train compartment. =>**

Let them improvise and develop their personalities followed by a spontaneous conversation. At the end they give a feedback on their improvisation. How did they feel the situation developed? Was it easy, difficult, fun etc.? You can do the same activity with role cards. Give each pupil a card with character roles and their destination. The pupils can then develop a conversation on the basis of their individual roles.

5. Background and themes

- madness
- entrapment
- guilt
- complicity
- criminal potential

Madness and entrapment: The play explores how both ordered and disordered lives can lead to “abnormal” behavior and disturbed minds. The limits of entrapment, innocence and guilt, and madness and sanity fade as the plot develops and the spectator is faced with a Guy who isn’t completely innocent and a Bruno that can be seen as a victim. The awakening of Guy’s destructive desires suggests that conflict between conscious behavior and subconscious desire may trigger the criminal potential in anyone, and result in immoral action, the doubling of personality and the consequent ethical and psychological degradation.

Guilt and complicity / criminal potential: The author Patricia Highsmith once commented that she is “interested in the effect of guilt” on her heroes. The novel and the play are a study of guilt, and the kind of pressures that destroy a man’s soul. The exploration of guilt also provokes a reflection on the definition and limits of complicity.

6. Topics for Discussion

Describe the 1950s cultural construct of good versus evil. What does good and evil look like? Why is this important given the plot of the play "Strangers on a Train"? Do either Guy or Bruno conform to cultural expectations of what good and evil was? Do they conform to modern-day assumptions about good and evil? Why or why not?

Bruno's declaration that anyone can commit a murder is important not only in the play, but for society. Bruno directs this comment at Guy. Why did Guy not take Bruno seriously at first? Did Guy ever take Bruno seriously? Why did Guy commit a murder? Does this prove that anyone can commit a murder? Why or why not?

7. Reviews of earlier productions

7.1 Strangers at the Gielgud Theatre (*The Guardian* 20-11-2013)



“Theatre is theatre, film is film. Right? Actually not any more as the two mediums increasingly converge. And the bizarre fact about this production, although based on the 1949 Patricia Highsmith novel rather than the subsequent Hitchcock movie, is that it

feels, for much of the evening, like a piece of film noir. This is theatre turning into cinema rather than borrowing from it.

The evening begins with the filmic image of an onrushing train. We then shift to a public compartment where Guy Haines has his fateful encounter with Charles Bruno. But everything about the first half suggests we are in for a night at the movies. We get multiple short scenes. Tim Goodchild's busily revolving set is shadowed by Peter Wilms's video projections so that we see the landscape through which the train is passing. To clinch matters, the sound design deliberately echoes the nerve-jangling scores that Bernard Herrmann wrote for Hitchcock. Craig Warner has written the script. It felt sometimes as if it was more the work of Warner Brothers.

All this, I confess, gives the first half a bustling momentum as we see Guy drawn into his fatal pact with Bruno: one in which Bruno offers to kill Guy's faithless wife if Guy will kill Bruno's dominating father. But, while the mechanics of the dual murders are moderately exciting, in the second half the tension decelerates as we get a psychological case-study. In the more entertaining Hitchcock movie, it was evident that Bruno represented Guy's dark side and was the Hyde to his Jekyll. But here the focus is on the implicitly homosexual bond between the two men. Why, you wonder, would the shy, Plato-reading Guy go to Bruno's private train compartment if he were not strangely drawn to him? And, as Bruno's attentions become ever more clamorous and he seeks to be part of Guy's second marriage, the point is made again and again. The problem is that what starts as fast-moving noirish narrative shifts uneasily into Freudian casebook.

The whole thing is staged with hyper-efficiency by Robert Allan Ackerman and there are some striking visual effects: not least the reduction of the surrounding characters to frozen dummies whenever Guy and Bruno are involved in an intimate tete-a-tete. But, although the show looks good, the acting is a more mixed bag. Laurence Fox is rather stolidly English as Guy, suggesting a house-prefect drawn into some dirty business by one of his raffish juniors. Jack Huston looks more at ease as the serpentine, psychotic, white-suited Bruno and Miranda Raison is all cool, high-society poise as Guy's wife. [...]

7.2 Strangers at the Gielgud Theatre (*The Hollywood Reporter* 20-11-2013)



Closer to Patricia Highsmith's novel than Alfred Hitchcock's film, this stage adaptation stars Jack Huston as a dangerous drunk with a murderous proposition for Laurence Fox.

LONDON -- Early on in the new West End play *Strangers on a Train*, one character, trying to get another on his side, exults that they are like men drawn in stark black and white opposed by a world of gray. As if unsure everyone at the back of the theater got the point, the show literalizes the idea through production and costume design, fabricating a strictly monochrome world where only glasses of sangria, red hair and orange flames provide the rare splashes of color. This is a nifty visual trick, one that handily evokes film noir aesthetic in a hat tip to **Alfred Hitchcock's** 1951 film adaptation of the same story, which most viewers will probably know better than **Patricia Highsmith's** 1950 debut

novel.

The suspicion lingers, however, that neither the line nor the staging is much more than flashy faux profundity, entertaining but empty, much like the show itself. Nevertheless, with sturdy but hardly revelatory performances from leads **Laurence Fox** and **Jack Huston**, the play looks set to pull in nostalgic crowds drawn by word of the production's impressive stagecraft.

Parodied and alluded to in countless other films and TV shows, the core conceit of *Strangers on a Train* is by now iconic. Filthy rich, idle, sexually ambiguous Charles Bruno (Huston, best known for TV's *Boardwalk Empire*) meets handsome Guy Haines (Fox) on a train – as in Highsmith's novel, Haines is an aspiring architect, whereas Hitchcock made him a rising tennis star – and over drinks in a private berth they get to know each other. Bruno hates his rich father, whom he sees as a controlling spoilsport. He intuits that Guy likewise has little love for his unfaithful wife Miriam (**Myanna Buring**), a childhood sweetheart gone sour whom he hopes to divorce soon. Bruno proposes that he murder Miriam and Guy kill his father, but Guy laughs off the suggestion.

Bruno, however, is deadly serious and goes through with his end of the unagreed bargain, strangling Miriam at a Texas fairground. It's an enchantingly creepy scene, one that literally revolves around the production's whirling scenery, transformed temporarily into a merry-go-

round with lickety-split speed by unseen stage hands. Spooky snatches from what sounds like **Dimitri Tiomkin's** original score for the film are mixed with stock calliope music, which alongside eerie lighting and film projections enhance the atmosphere of innocence-defiling seediness. This sets a dramatic high-water mark that the rest of the production never quite matches.

Viewers who only know the Hitchcock version -- a bravura work of cinema even if it completely bowdlerizes the story -- will be taken aback by the direction of the plot thereafter. This cleaves more closely to Highsmith's original, although playwright **Craig Warner's** text also diverges dramatically from her template in the last act. Evoking shades of Highsmith's beloved **Dostoyevsky**, Bruno manages to browbeat Guy into going through with the murder of Bruno's father as the first act ends, even though this will have nothing but grave consequences on Guy's burgeoning architectural career and his relationship with his tony, socialite fiancée Anne (**Miranda Raison**, doing her excellent best with an underwritten role).

One of Hitchcock's few improvements on Highsmith was to emphasize even more strongly the disparity in class between Guy on the one hand and Bruno on the other, making Guy more of a social-climber and an outsider with much to lose by his involvement in murder. Class is a more muted issue here, sensed mainly in the contempt the characters express for trashy, duplicitous Miriam. Indeed, there's a certain revelry in the lives of the rich and indolent, delivered especially in scenes with Bruno's louche, cougar-ish mother (**Imogen Stubbs**), whose relationship with her son has quasi-incestuous overtones that seem, weirdly, to be played here for laughs.

That twisted mother-son relationship seems to serve up an almost textbook 1940s explanation for Bruno's clearly closeted but palpable homosexuality. It's a rather retrograde note even as the play foregrounds in a very contemporary, audience-pleasing way the homoerotic undercurrents present in Highsmith's book.

Huston does a particularly fine job of projecting through posture, covert touches of the hand, and ingratiating smiles his stalker-like, unrequited passion for Guy, letting tiny camp intonations infiltrate his speech even as the character does his best to present a straight-acting front. It rounds out the role, and makes Bruno much more sympathetic, especially in the last act when he starts to unravel properly, both emotionally and physically from the effects of too much booze.

Unfortunately, Guy as written here is less three-dimensional, and in Fox's hands, he becomes a somewhat inscrutable, brooding cipher. Fox's projection skills are not as refined as Huston's, so he swings disconcertingly between mumbled growls and violent ranting. The latter helps to wake up the sleepier audience members during the longueurs of the second act, but otherwise it's an interior performance that might have worked better on film than stage.

Director **Robert Allan Ackerman** (best known for Broadway productions of *Bent*, *Slab Boys*, and a resident directorship at the New York Shakespeare Festival, as well as the film *Safe Passage*) strives to bring a kinetic energy to the proceedings. But the constituent elements of melodrama, detective story and psychological showdown never quite knit together, to the extent that tonally the two acts seem to come from two different plays.

Too many scenes feel inconsequential to the action, while that impressive revolving stage is pressed into action one or two times too often to show nothing much happening elsewhere just because it can. Perhaps the idea was to find a correlative to the unsettling plasticity of space and time that Highsmith creates in her interior monologue-heavy prose, which suggests a woozy sense of the ground or many hours shifting underneath the characters' feet before they even notice it themselves. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite come off here, despite the undoubtedly onerous effects of lighting and projection designs by **Tim Lutkin** and **Peter Wilms** respectively. But at least it's clear throughout that no expense was spared by **Barbara Broccoli** and the other producers to create eye-catching mainstream entertainment.

7.3 Activities

1. Read the two reviews and in pairs work out the necessary elements for a drama review.
2. Read the two reviews and detect positive and negative aspects expressed by the authors. Discuss whether one outweighs the other.
3. Perform part of the play and write your own review about the performance.
4. Write a review of the production at The English Theatre Frankfurt.

8. The Hitchcock movie (1951)

8.1 Famous quotes

BRUNO: I certainly admire people who do things. People who do things are important. Now me, I never seem to do anything.

BRUNO: Scotch and water please. A pair. Doubles. The only kind of doubles I play.

BRUNO: What is a life or two, Guy? Some people are better off dead. Your wife and my father, for instance.

BRUNO: You do my murder, I do yours. Criss cross.

MRS. ANTHONY: I do hope you're forgotten all about that silly little plan of yours.

BRUNO: Which one?

MRS. ANTHONY: About blowing up the White House.

BARBARA: Daddy doesn't mind a little scandal, he's a senator.

BARBARA: I still think it would be wonderful to have a man love you so much he'd kill for you.

SEN. MORTON: Even the most unworthy of us has the right to life and the pursuit of happiness.

BARBARA: From what I hear, she pursued it in every direction.

BRUNO: My theory is that everyone is a potential murderer.

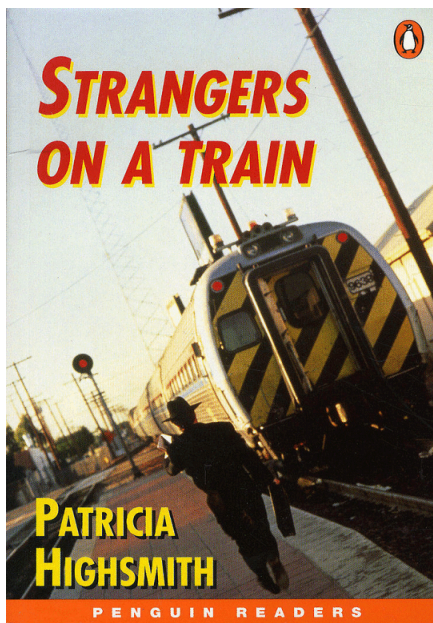
BARBARA: He looked at me. His hands were on her throat, Anne; he was strangling me.

8.2 Activities

- As far as you can, match the quotes to the relevant acts and scenes of the theatre play and describe their situational background. – Note: some quotes are only specific to the movie. Think of a scene that might have been left out in the theatre play and include the quotes that don't match?
- Present and describe the characters of the quotes.
- In pairs, act out a little role play to one quote of your choice (improvise freely).
- Communication question in pairs: Can you personally relate to one or several of these quotes? Do you agree/disagree with them?

9. The novel

9.1. Chapter content



Chapters 1–2: Guy Haines is on a train, reading a book and thinking of Anne, the woman he loves. He meets Charles Bruno and they have dinner together. Bruno tells Guy that he hates his father, who refuses to give him money. Guy tells Bruno that Miriam is pregnant and makes trouble about the divorce. Completely drunk, Bruno suggests he could kill Miriam and Guy could kill Bruno's father. Guy leaves Bruno's room, disgusted, and forgets his book. Once in Metcalf, his home town, Guy finds out that Miriam wants to move with him until her fiancé gets his divorce. With his plan still in mind, Bruno makes his first call.

Chapters 3–5: Guy tells Anne that he feels he hates Miriam when he has to refuse a job in Florida because she threatens to move there. But Miriam loses the baby

and Guy gets the job back. In the meantime, Bruno, on holiday in Mexico with a frivolous mother, begins to plan

Miriam's death from the details that Guy mentioned in their conversation. At the station on his way to Metcalf, he meets his friend Wilson. Once in Metcalf, he finds Miriam's address in the directory, follows her in a taxi to an amusement park and strangles her. After a short visit to a bar, he goes back to the station and asks a taxi driver where he can get a woman.

Chapters 6–8: Guy is with Anne when his mother phones to inform him of the murder. He gets stunned. He can't remember what exactly he said to Bruno on the train. Guy tries to get Bruno out of his mind, but cards, letters and phone calls confirm his fears: it was Bruno. In

his panic and guilt, Guy begins to lie. Meanwhile, in California, Bruno feels powerful. He tells his mother he has met Guy on a train when she sees his newspaper cut-outs with stories about the murder. Bruno feels his bond with Guy has given him a reason to live, so Guy's rejection hurts him deeply. A few months later, he goes back to Guy and threatens to involve him in Miriam's murder unless he kills his father. He writes, calls, sends Guy a plan, a weapon and a map of the house, and finally, a letter to Anne. Guy keeps lying.

Chapters 9–10:

After three months, Bruno sends a second letter, now to a company that is about to employ Guy. Guy loses the job and decides that killing Bruno's father is the only way out of the trap he is in. And he kills him. Except for some pieces of his torn gloves that stay on some tree branches, a few scratches on his face and hands and a servant that sees him from afar, the plan works out, and Guy can escape. The need to keep lying and his fear of losing Anne make him cry.

Chapters 11–13: Arthur Gerard is Bruno's father's detective. He has reconstructed the murderer's steps and suspects that Bruno may be involved in the crime. Bruno rejoices in the perfection of his plan, but he gets broken when he overhears his ever-protective mother tell Gerard that she would inform him of anything Bruno said. What if she remembered the cut-outs? Guy, in the meantime, tries to fight his guilt and feels split into two men, the murderer and the architect about to marry Anne. Bruno turns up at the wedding and Guy feels on the edge of being discovered.

Chapters 14–16: Guy's feeling of guilt and Bruno's feeling of rejection grow with Bruno's successive visits. Gerard finds Bruno's bills for his telephone calls to Metcalf and the flowers for Anne, as well as Guy's book. The waiter on the train has told him that Bruno and Guy had dinner together. Gerard asks questions to Bruno, Guy and Anne.

Chapters 17–19: Gerard tells the story to the police. He knows what has happened but cannot prove it. Sometime later, the police stop asking questions. Guy is living in Canada and Anne is pregnant. But Bruno turns up once again. During an outing on the boat, drunk and feeling unwell, Bruno falls to the water and drowns. Bruno's death leaves Guy in utter loneliness. He cannot take all the responsibility for the crimes. He writes a letter to Anne and goes to see Owen, Miriam's fiancé. In his own hotel room and despite Owen's indifference, Guy tells him the story of the crimes. Under the bed, the telephone is off the hook, and Gerard takes Guy.

9.2. Activities regarding the novel

Chapters 1–2

Before reading

1 Group work: In groups, students read the title of the book and the chapter headings. They guess what the story may be about and who the "strangers on a train" are. Groups share their ideas and vote for the prediction they like best.

After reading

2 Discuss: Students work in groups. Ask them: *What kind of parents do you think Bruno has? What kind of childhood do you think he had? Why?*

3 Role play: Put students in pairs. Tell them: *Imagine Miriam is telling Owen about her plans to go to Florida with Guy. How do you think Owen reacts? Write and role play their conversation.* Ask students to keep their conversations so they can compare them with Owen's feelings at the end of the novel.

Chapters 3–5

Before reading

4 Guess: Students read the title of Chapter 3. In pairs they discuss what they think the good news is.

After reading

5 Discuss: Students work in groups. Tell them: *Bruno is a murderer and a bad man. But is he mad as well? Give reasons for your opinion.* Have the groups report their conclusions to the class. Then divide the class into two groups and have them debate this question: *If Bruno is mad, does this mean he isn't responsible for his actions? Should a mad person be punished?*

6 Write: Tell students: *An alibi is proof that a person was in another place when a crime was committed. Imagine Bruno is making up his alibi. Write what he can tell the police about what he was doing on the day Miriam was murdered. Remember that some people saw him.* Students vote for the best alibi.

Chapters 6–8

Before reading

7 Guess: Tell students: *These are lines from one of these chapters. What do you think is happening?* "Guy was looking at his drawings, but there were no houses on the paper, they were all drawings of Bruno's smiling face with his red, tired eyes."

After reading

8 Read carefully and discuss:

a Divide the class into three groups. They read pages 19, 21 and 26 respectively and find the lies that Guy begins to tell and who he tells them to.

b The whole class then discusses the reasons why Guy tells these lies.

9 Discuss: Divide the class into two groups and have them discuss this question: *Guy feels guilty because he hasn't stopped Bruno killing Miriam. Is he really guilty?*

10 Pair work: Students look up the word "trap" in the dictionary. Tell them: *Guy is in a trap. What is it?*

Chapters 9–10

Before reading

11 Guess: In pairs, students discuss the following question: *Bruno sent two letters saying that Guy knew about Miriam's murder. One letter was for Anne. Who do you think he sent the second letter to? Why?*

After reading

12 Pair work, Discuss: In pairs, students take the roles of Bruno and Guy and take turns to narrate the scene at the end of Chapter 10 with the focus on their feelings. Then the whole class discusses this apparent paradox: *Guy accepts what he doesn't want and feels better; Bruno gets what he wants, but is sad.*

13 Artwork: In groups, students make Bruno's map. On it, they write notes from his plan. They may include details of the house and surroundings that aren't mentioned in the narration but complete the drawing. Maps are displayed on the classroom walls.

Chapters 11–13

Before reading

14 Guess: Students work in pairs. Tell them: *In these chapters we learn that Guy won't take any money for building something to try to fight his guilt. What do you think he will build? Why?* Pairs share their ideas with the class.

After reading

15 Role play: Students work in pairs. Tell them: *Bruno is afraid that his mother remembers the stories about Guy from the newspaper. Imagine he has a conversation with her to try to find out if she does. Decide whether she remembers or not.*

Chapters 14–16

Before reading

16 Guess: Ask students: *Why do you think Chapter 14 is called The Secret Brother? Who do you think this secret brother is?*

After reading

17 Check and discuss: Check students' predictions in activity 16. Tell them: *On page 38, Guy thinks of the bad man inside him as "his secret brother" and Bruno wants to hold Guy's hand "like a brother". Do you think the title of the chapter refers to both things? What are Bruno's and Guy's feelings for each other? What are Guy's feelings about himself?*

18 Discuss: Tell students: *At this point, it isn't very important whether Guy is caught or not. His guilt is a prison.* In groups, students discuss the statement.

Chapters 17–19

Before reading

19 Guess and write: Tell students: *Are Bruno and Guy going to be caught? Write the ending you would like the story to have.*

After reading

20 Check: Ask students to check Owen's feelings against their conversations in activity 3.

21 Discuss, Group work: Students work in groups. Ask them: *Why do you think Guy writes a letter to Anne? And why does he tell Owen the truth about the murders?* Groups report their conclusions and compare them to their ideas in activity 18.

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