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Distance and Desire:
Homoeroticism in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the
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in Partial Fulfillment
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This masters thesis is dedicated to Katherine Faull, Ph. D., of the German Department of Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, whose inspiration not only brought me to graduate school, but is also the impetus for this project.

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this masters thesis is to examine how homosexuality is represented in Thomas Mann's 1913 novella *Death in Venice* , and to demonstrate how Mann was able to incorporate such a taboo issue in a story that Wilhelmine Germany would come to embrace.

The study consists of four chapters which examine four contexts in which the story, for the purposes of this thesis, should be interpreted. The first is historical, in which the previous reception of the novella, as well as the author's own struggle with his identity, is investigated. In the second, Mann's philosophical paradigms to represent homoeroticism, drawn largely from classical Greece and Nietzsche, are examined. Freud's views of homosexuality and sublimation furnish the basis for the third chapter, in which sublimated imagery of sexual desire in the text is considered. Finally, the narrative strategies employed by Mann that render the story palatable to his heterosexual, bourgeois reading audience are illustrated in the fourth chapter.

RÉSUMÉ

Le but du présent mémoire de maîtrise est d'examiner la représentation de l'homosexualité dans la nouvelle de Thomas Mann *La Mort à Venise* (1913) et de démontrer comment Mann réussit à incorporer un sujet aussi tabou dans une histoire que l'Allemagne de Guillaume II viendrait à apprécier.

L'analyse se divise en quatre chapitres qui examinent chacun quatre contextes différents à travers lesquels la nouvelle est interprétée. Le premier chapitre se penche sur le contexte historique entourant la nouvelle, notamment sur sa réception antérieure et sur le combat de l'auteur avec sa propre identité. Dans le deuxième chapitre, les paradigmes philosophiques développés par Mann afin de repésenter l'homoérotisme - ceux-ci en grande partie inspirés de la Grèce classique ainsi que de Nietzsche - sont examinés. Les vues de Freud sur l'homosexualité et la sublimation forment le point de départ du troisième chapitre dans lequel l'imagerie sublimée du désir sexuel présente dans la nouvelle est analysée. Finalement, les stratégies narratives utilisées par Mann afin de rendre son oeuvre acceptable à son public de lecteurs hétérosexuels et bourgeois seront illustrées dans le dernier chapitre.

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Introduction

> *Bald kannte der Betrachtende jede Linie und Pose dieses so gehobenen, so frei sich darstellenden Körpers, begrüßte freudig jede schon vertraute Schönheit aufs neue und fand der Bewunderung, der zarten Sinneslust kein Ende. ...;er lief herbei, lief naß vielleicht aus der Flut, er warf die Locken, und indem er die Hand reichte, auf einem Beine ruhend, den anderen Fuß auf die Zehenspitzen gestellt, hatte er eine reizende Drehung und Wendung des Körpers.... Er lag [dann] ausgestreckt, das Badetuch um die Brust geschlungen,..., und nichts konnte bezaubernder sein als das Lächeln der Augen und Lippen, mit dem der Ausgezeichnete zu dem Geringeren, Dienenden aufblickte.* [1]

This quotation from Thomas Mann's 1913 novella *Death in Venice*, purposely removed from its context and stripped of the protective, aesthetic coating in which Mann painstakingly encapsulated it, surely exposes an overwhelming and moving account of unbridled passion and eroticism. What remains here of Mann's attempt to diffuse desire is Eros in the most basic form. The language is simply far too sensual for us to attribute the origin of this desire "merely" to artistic inspiration and absolute Beauty. Consider another blatantly passionate excerpt which speaks to us of love, frustration, and of the basic yearning to unite with another, regardless of sexual orientation:

> *Er war so erschüttert, daß er das Licht der Terrasse, des Vorgartens zu fliehen gezwungen war und mit hastigen Schritten das Dunkel des rückwärtigen Parkes suchte. Sonderbar entrüstete und zärtliche Vermahnungen entrangen*

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[1] Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* , vol. 8 of *Thomas Mann: Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden*.(Oldenburg: S. Fischer, 1960) 489-490. All further references to *Death in Venice* are to this edition.

> *sich ihm: 'Du darfst so nicht lächeln!'... Er warf sich auf eine Bank.... Und zurückgelehnt, mit hängenden Armen, überwältigt und mehrfach von Schauern überlaufen, flüsterte er die stehende Formel der Sehnsucht, - unmöglich hier, absurd, verworfen, lächerlich und heilig doch, ehrwürdig auch hier noch: 'Ich liebe dich!'* (498).

There is a naked truth in these images that most critics chose to oversee for 50 years which, now in a contemporary setting, can be divulged, analyzed and discussed. This paper is an attempt to reveal that taboo discourse which was repressed. I would like to examine the strategies used to codify and sublimate homosexuality in Mann's *Death in Venice*, to elucidate how Mann was able to publish a story about artistic inspiration and beauty, but simultaneously a story of homosexual desire in Wilhelmine Germany. The impetus for performing a close reading of the homosexuality lies in its cryptic and ambivalent representation in the text. Mann utilizes a variety of devices to be able to say that which could not be said explicitly. This thesis will examine how Mann codified homosexual desire in order to symbolically represent homosexuality. My discussion of this codification can hopefully shed new light on the homoerotic elements of the story and help view central textual aspects of *Death in Venice* in a new light. I will examine how Mann incorporated the Greek tradition of the Socrates-Phaidros dialogues in the attempt to protect Aschenbach from his desire for Tadzio. He took the deviant, pathological edge off homoeroticism by aesthetisizing it, and thereby created a self-defense mechanism not just for the protagonist, but for himself also. Mann was likewise able to sublimate homosexual desire through classical, particularly Greek, culture and thus

potentially evade criticism. The discourse on Apollonian and Dionysian principles is relevant in elucidating the Nietzschean dualism which Mann typically structured in his work; it lays a foundation for the possibility for Mann to sublimate homosexuality, that is to say, to introduce a decadent theme without having to reject respectability, and the possibility to explore the irreconcilability of the two perspectives. I will also investigate how Mann transfigured and codified homosexual desire itself, in order to be able to include it as a theme in his story at all. By illustrating Freud's view of homosexuality and his theories on sexual repression and sublimation, I will demonstrate the sublimated imagery of homosexual desire inherent in the text. Finally, in my conclusion I will illustrate the narrative strategies Mann employs to create a line of identification between Aschenbach and the reader, as well the distance that is needed for the reader to be able to accept the story. How he ironically juxtapositions the voice of the omniscient narrator with the voice of Aschenbach not only reflects Mann's own struggle with the issue of homosexuality, but also afforded Mann another strategy to be able to write such a decadent story in a way which his reading public could find socially acceptable and even embrace.

Chapter 1: The History of and Behind *Death in Venice*

In this introductory chapter I would briefly like to recapitulate the history of the reception of *Death in Venice* to demonstrate how it was traditionally received and reinforce why it has been important to reread the story from a different, more contemporary perspective. Until approximately the 1970's, the issue of explicit homoeroticism in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* was rejected; for the most part, critics chose not to see the homosexuality in *Death in Venice* because of their heterosexist disposition and therefore turned a blind eye to this forbidden discourse. As Karl Werner Böhm has explained, Mann's contemporary critics could essentially be divided into three categories: those who preferred to ignore the homoerotic aspect altogether, those who concentrated on the symbolic nature of the subject, and finally those who were offended by the subject matter.[2] Böhm claims that many perceived the homosexuality as "accessory" and "*es kann kein Zweifel daran bestehen, daß dies für das Gros der Kritiker die erste und entscheidende Bedingung war, die Novelle als Ganze zu akzeptieren*"[3] . Not only the minimizing of homosexual desire in the story, but also the fact that Aschenbach's behavior leads

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[2] Karl Werner Böhm, *Zwischen Selbstzucht und Verlangen: Thomas Mann und das Stigma Homosexualität; Untersuchungen zu Frühwerk und Jugend* (Würzburg: Könighausen und Neumann, 1991) 17-18. See also de Mendelssohn, *Der Zauberer: Das Leben des deutschen Schriftstellers Thomas Mann*, 906-918.

[3] Böhm 18, 328.

to his demise, was a reassurance for the public; had Aschenbach not been "condemned" to death, had "morality" not prevailed in this story, most critics would have avoided addressing the issue of homosexuality at all.

There certainly were, however, groups that were interested in working through the homoerotic theme of the story. Some, like psychoanalyst Hans Sachs (1914) took the liberal position of adopting a psychoanalytical approach to the story.[4] However, it was "out", public, literary and cultural figures who chose to confront the homosexuality in *Death in Venice* directly. Böhm, again, divides the homosexual critics into four categories. The first is the group following the Stephan George circle[5], which centered around the elite, pagan-like "*Knabenkult*", worshipping a young, deceased, god-like youth named Maximin. Secondly, some critics, like Kurt Hiller, one of the founders of the homosexual rights activist Scientific-Humanitarian Committee who wrote the article "*Wo bleibt der homoerotische Roman*" (1914), were disappointed by the negative, merely symbolic depiction of homosexuality and its connection to morality, decadence and illness.[6] It was their activist, avant-garde objective to encourage positive, true-to-life representation of homosexual life and culture, which, however, they believed was not presented in *Death in Venice*. Other gay critics even accused Mann of

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[4] Böhm 21.

[5] Böhm 21.

[6] James W. Jones, "*We of the Third Sex*": *Literary Representations of Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany*, German Life and Civilization Ser. vol. 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 283; Böhm 22, 332.

using homosexuality to sell his books.[7] Those like Mann's personal acquaintance Carl Maria Weber felt, on the other hand, that Thomas Mann reached homosexuals and that many homosexuals could, indeed did, identify with the character Aschenbach and his being an outsider.[8] Finally there were the critics such as the homosexual activist Magnus Hirschfeld, another founding member and chairman of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, who viewed the short story as a triumph for homosexuals. They were particularly proud to claim visible representation of homosexuality in a public space, especially through the noble medium of literature.[9] Despite the conflicting opinions, the fact that the homosexual theme was being acknowledged was already a progressive step forward, even if these critics were in the minority.

However, under the Third Reich and the backlash against Weimar liberalism, the novella was inevitably seen and used as a control mechanism to warn of the dangers of the degeneration of a declining Western civilization. The elements of racism, sickness, and "*Entartung*" in the story surely were not intended by Mann to support and legitimize the fight against "degeneration", but were indeed used to that effect. [10]

Later in the 50's, Frank Donald Hirschbach, Hans Mayer and Harald Kohtz were some of the first researchers who pursued the

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[7] Jones 283.

[8] Böhm 22.

[9] Böhm 22-23.

[10] Böhm 24-25, 332.

recurring homosexual elements in Mann's work. Some significant works published in the 60's by Ignace Feuerlicht and Jeffrey Meyers began explicitly discussing Thomas Mann's personal sexual orientation and representation of homosexual desire in his work. However, this research was done before Mann's diaries and letters became accessible, at a time when there was much debate over whether Mann's representation of homosexuality was intended by him to be positive or negative. This issue was essentially resolved with the publication of Mann's notebooks, diaries and letters. It was 22 years after his death, in accordance with his wishes, that Mann's diaries were made public information and that Mann was "outed", the consequence of which shook the world of Mann researchers. No longer could the latent homosexuality of this influential author be ignored. For those who had in the past attempted to view Mann's work as "gay", this was an extremely valorizing moment. For those who had considered the homosexual elements purely metaphorically and sublimated the homosexual desire, as Mann did, it was time to reassess their work. The whole direction of Mann research would from this point on have to be reconsidered, altered and revised.

Böhm discovered three tendencies after the publication of this "new-found" knowledge. One direction focuses on the supposed bisexual and "*Androgynen-Ideal*" of the Thomas Mann image, still, however, following in the path of the older, traditional Mann research.[11] These critics preferred to view Mann as the mediator of the "*utopischen Vollkommenheit eines 'bisexuellen' Kontinuums*"[12]

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[11] Böhm 41.

[12] Böhm 46.

and left the question of homosexuality per se at the fringes of their studies. The second direction continues the Mann research in a pathological light, following in the footsteps of Heinz Kohut.[13] A central motif for these researchers was Mann's narcissistic inclination in his work, using Freud's theories of narcissism to identify Mann's "pathological condition". Through psychoanalytic methods they attempted to investigate his sexual "misdevelopment" and familial relationships, and how and why homosexuality presents itself in his work.[14] The final direction was committed to homosexuality as a central and significant theme in itself in Mann's work, concentrating on the homosexual outsiderness of Thomas Mann.[15] Most of these researchers were themselves gay and, writing in the late 1980's, have from their position added new and sometimes insightful dimensions to the discourse of homosexuality in Thomas Mann's work.

The cultural, social and political climates in which *Death in Venice* has historically been received are well known to us, and now that I have given a brief overview of the reception of the novella itself, it is of utmost importance to consider how the author himself was viewed, since public opinion was of great relevance to Thomas Mann and had a substantial influence on his writing and how he carried himself. In general we can say that Thomas Mann has been considered to straddle the socially accepted line of respectability. On

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[13] Böhm 41.

[14] Böhm 49.

[15] Böhm 41-42.

the one hand, he was the incarnation of *Bürgerlichkeit* . He upheld those bourgeois virtues so essential to Wilhelmine Germany and was a vanguard of German culture. His respectability, intellect, discipline, and uprightness made him a representative *Bürger*, father, husband, German. Thomas Mann wrote in a letter (4.7.1920) to Carl Maria Weber: "*Ich bin Familiensohn und Familienvater von Instinkt und Überzeugung. Ich liebe meine Kinder....- da haben Sie den 'Bürger'.*"[16]. However, one must also consider Thomas Mann's counter persona, which is traceable in his writing and was not always readily accepted. He was a man accused of having homoerotic relations, the father of three homosexual children, a man with a family history of artistic proclivity and mental illness, which was seen as a manifestation of degeneration. If he was the incarnation of *Bürgerlichkeit*, he was also the incarnation of the decadent artist yearning for a fulfilling life in a society which compelled him to behave according to their standards. The following line in his letter to Weber continues: "*Soll nun aber vom Erotischen, vom unbürgerlichen, geistig-sinnlichen Abenteuer die Rede sein, so stellen die Dinge sich doch ein wenig anders dar.*"[17] Throughout his life and much of his work, Thomas Mann struggled with his irreconcilability of these life perspectives. However, his discovery of Hans Blüher, for whom Mann had great respect and by whose theories he was fascinated and influenced[18], aided him in his difficulty with these

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[16] Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Ficher, 1961) 178.

[17] Thomas Mann, *Briefe* 178-179.

[18] Ignace Feuerlicht, *Thomas Mann und die Grenzen des Ich* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1966) 169.

conflicting positions. Blüher wrote in his book entitled *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*, that, while women have a natural predisposition only to tend to the family, men are socially double-sided, their second inclination being a striving for "*männlichen Gesellschaft*"[19]. Mann's identification with this perspective is demonstrated in his comment about Blüher's idea of society and male friendship: "*Was mich persönlich betrifft, so ist mein Interesse zwischen Blühers beiden Prinzipien der Gesellschaft, der Familie und den Männerbünden, einigermaßen geteilt.*"[20] Moreover, Mann's partiality toward male company and endorsement of male "*Gesellungstrieb*"[21] recurs in his political affirmation "*Betrachtung eines Unpolitischen*".

There were a number of often conflicting circles addressing homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany. Some were advocates of the homosexual emancipation movement, some considered homosexuality in discourses on race, and others still viewed homoeroticism in connection with nationality. However, the most popular discussions of the subject by far included medicalized discourses, whose influence permeated all other forums. Although gaining visibility, homosexuality was nonetheless seen as an evil of society and a taboo issue. The first decade of this century was still a volatile time to be addressing such topics, especially considering the

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[19] Hans Blüher, *Familie und Mannerbund* , vol. 2 of *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1921) 91.

[20] Thomas Mann, *Briefe* 178.

[21] Blüher, *Familie und Männerbund* 92.

numerous scandals that erupted in Germany. For example, those surrounding Alfred Krupp (1903) and Prince Philipp zu Eulenberg (1907-1909), as well as other close friends and associates of Kaiser Wilhelm II, resulted in allegations of homosexuality against the defensive Kaiser himself, who vainly attempted to project a paternal image, and affected domestic politics, resulting in extreme sensitivity to the subject and "an anti-homosexual witch hunt of unparalleled proportions"[22], in which anyone became a suspect. Even if at the turn of the century more differentiated and positively accentuated discourses on homosexuality were current, the first decade of the century took a turn which blocked the positive reception of those discussions. It seems as though for most it was better to be invisible, than risk indictment.

So how, then, was Mann perceived in the wake of this backlash? Although - at the latest with the publication of *Death in Venice* - Thomas Mann was known to incorporate "decadent" and even homosexual themes in his writing, he was for the most part not considered to be a homosexual himself, since the majority of the public considered him to be sexually differentiated from his homosexual characters. No one wanted to entertain the possibility that the *Bürger* Thomas Mann could actually be a homosexual; the fact that he wrote about degenerate and homoerotic topics, did not necessarily mean he was writing from experience. Yet, precariously balanced on the thin line of respectability, Thomas Mann, like many suspected of deviant sexual inclinations, still strove to uphold his

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[22] James D. Steakley, *The homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno, 1975) 37.

dignified persona by assuming and publicly defending a heterosexual orientation. For example, he ensured that his biographer mentioned that *Death in Venice* was written by a "'*glücklichen jungen Ehemann*'[23] *in den Jahren seiner 'vollsten männlichen Entfaltung*'"[24]. In interviews Mann claimed that he chose to create a homosexual character merely to illustrate the fall of a hero, and that the homosexuality was not intended to be a topic in itself.[25] However, we now know that the private thoughts of Thomas Mann did not necessarily coincide with his public affirmations. His entire life was a painful attempt to hide from the public these aspects of his psyche and personality, this conflict of reconciling his "degenerate", homosexual predilection and *Bürgerlichkeit*. Indeed Mann wrote in his diaries about the *Zwang, das "Geheimnis" zu wahren*[26]. On the one hand he knew the public would condemn his homosexuality. On the other hand, and I believe more importantly, he could not accept it himself. He was a man so engrained by German middle class values of respectability, that he could not come to terms with his inclination to sexual deviancy. However, his homoerotic inclination would manifest itself in his writing. Böhm writes:

> *Da es Thomas Mann zeit seines Lebens mehr um die Wahrung seines 'Geheimnisses' als um Authentizität zu tun war, hat sich die Textanalyse in seinem Fall zunächst*

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[23] Arthur Eloesser (1925) 168, qtd. in Böhm 322.

[24] Böhm 322.

[25] Böhm 23.

[26] Thomas Mann, *Thomas Mann Tagebücher* (11.7.1950), qtd. in Böhm 89.

> *auf die Strategien der Verhüllung von Homosexualität zu konzentrieren.*[27]

Indeed, Mann was more than willing to dissuade his suspecting critics. It seems that he developed other strategies for preserving his respectable image. For instance, we get the impression from his late notebooks and letters, that *Death in Venice* was originally to be about Goethe and a ridiculous, unattainable love; however, it is quite evident that incorporating the homoerotic theme into the story was never in doubt[28], even if he claims it made its way into the story at a later stage. Mann wrote to Weber:

> *Leidenschaft als Verwirrung und Entwürdigung war eigentlich der Gegenstand meiner Fabel, - was ich ursprünglich erzählen wollte, war überhaupt nichts Homo-Erotisches, es war die grotesk gesehene - Geschichte des Greises Goethe zu jenem kleinen Mädchen in Marienbad.... Was damals hinzukam, war ein persönlich-lyrisches Reiseerlebnis, das mich bestimmte, die Dinge durch Einführung des Motivs der 'Verbotenen'Liebe auf die Spitze zu stellen...*[29].

Böhm doubts whether Thomas Mann really did originally conceptualize *Death in Venice* in this way, as Mann constantly insisted. He argues that Mann often contradicted himself on this issue and that there are no indications of the Goethe-element in his letters, notebooks, or diaries (in which Mann documented virtually every detail) before or during the process of writing *Death in*

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[27] Böhm 308.

[28] Böhm 321.

[29] Thomas Mann, *Briefe* 177.

Venice.[30] He basically believes the Goethe-plan was used as a pretense to distract would-be anti-homosexual critics and the public at large. Furthermore, at the time of the publication of *Death in Venice*, Mann was, curiously enough, a member of the *Münchener Zensurbeirat*.[31] Böhm again questions his motives for joining such an establishment and is inclined to believe it was merely a cover, considering Mann resigned from his position in the organization after *Death in Venice* had received a positive reception and the coast was, so to speak, clear. [32]

Given the social climate of Mann's day, it is not that difficult to understand that he would have gone to such great lengths to maintain a "dignified" image, and it is interesting to see the correlation between how he masked his sexual orientation in his personal life and sublimated it in the sphere of his writing. But the question at issue here is what the artistic results of such a strategy are. In terms of Thomas Mann's personal life, it is clear what his objective was and what the majority of the public believed. What, then, now that we are willing to recognize and discuss the homoerotic theme, are the results of this sublimation in his writing?

It is most significant to realize that the attempt to neutralize the reader's explicit perception of the homosexual content in *Death in Venice*, does not result in a reduction or negation of the thematic homosexual elements. It does not mean on the textual level that

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[30] Böhm 324-325.

[31] Volkmar Hansen, *Thomas Mann* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche, 1984) 59; Böhm 322-323.

[32] Böhm 322-323.

Mann was trying to minimize or deny the homoeroticism in the story, when he encapsulated Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio in aestheticism, an acceptable discourse in which to introduce such a taboo subject. Mann almost apologetically wrote to Weber:

> *...denn es wäre mir höchst unerwünscht, wenn Ihnen - und anderen - der Eindruck bliebe, daß ich eine Gefühlsart, die ich ehre, weil sie fast notwendig - mit viel mehr Notwendigkeit jedenfalls, als die 'normale' - Geist hat, hätte verneinen oder...verleugnen wollen.*[33].

Although Mann claims he did not want to lie about the homosexual content of the story, no one will deny that he concealed it, as if it were the forbidden subject that it was. So what is the consequence of this? Although he extends the idea of interdiction and incitement to a power mechanism and an economy of sexuality, Foucault acknowledges that prohibition causes stimulation. He writes in his *History of Sexuality*: "...the 'putting into discourse of sex', far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement"[34]. Aschenbach may diffuse Tadzio's individuality and sexuality, as well as his explicit desire for the boy by enveloping this desire in a discourse of aestheticism because this is socially more acceptable, but Tadzio still influences Aschenbach's every action and ultimately remains the center of his attention and the plot. The reader cannot escape this fact and the outcome of Mann's sublimation strategy in actuality also

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[33] Thomas Mann, *Briefe* 176.

[34] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 12.

draws attention to and intensifies that which it seems he wanted to mask. This is evocative of a passage of Stefan Zweig's autobiography, "*Eros Matutinus*", in which he expounds on the "*Heimlichkeit*", "*Verdecken*", and "*Verstecken*" of Victorian sexuality.[35] Zweig proposed that in trying to hide or mask sexuality (he uses Victorian women's bodies as his example), one simultaneously accentuates it . He stated:

> *Durch diese unnatürliche Auseinanderspannung im äußeren Habitus mußte auch die innere Spannung zwischen den Polen, die Erotik, sich verstärken, und so erreichte ... die Gesellschaft von damals genau das Gegenteil. Denn da sie in ihrer unablässigen Angst und Prüderie dem Unsittlichen in allen Formen des Lebens, Literatur, Kunst, Kleidung ständig nachspürte, um jede Anreizung zu verhüten, war sie eigentlich gezwungen, unablässig an das Unsittliche zu denken.*[36]

I believe we can draw and analogy and extend this concept to *Death in Venice*. The sublimation and codification of homosexual desire in *Death in Venice* is not just a masking of the taboo; it likewise serves as an affirmation of the desire. Even if the reader feels the text is condemning homosexuality, the reader must realize that homosexuality is being acknowledged and its very existence is being confirmed; in this way, Thomas Mann was able to express that which could not be said.

Moreover, this interdiction, this prohibition against overtly addressing homosexuality, likewise enhances the desire to do so. By

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[35] Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern*, (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1958) 75.

[36] Zweig 76.

leading us through Aschenbach's pursuit of Tadzio, the pain and pleasure of it, the narrator acknowledges and simultaneously magnifies this desire for the reader, expressly because such behavior is socially unacceptable. For some, acknowledging the taboo content of the story, even if it seemed neutralized to them, may have been a "cheap thrill". For others, however, the homoeroticism caused a different kind of incitement. Such a forbidden taboo becomes all the more exciting when encapsulated in an enticing, dualistic narrative that lets the reader come close enough to feel Aschenbach's desire, yet distanced enough to allow the reader to condemn him and exercise a sense of control over the story, if not also feel a sense of personal security and reassurance. As Foucault explains:

> What one might call the internal discourse of the institution...was largely based on the assumption that...sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active and ever present[37]

and it was this institution that eventually wanted to target the taboo, in order to attempt to condemn or regulate its perpetuation through a controlled discourse. Although Foucault was referring to repressive, Victorian perspectives on sexuality, we can apply the following statement to the effects of interdiction in *Death in Venice*: Foucault believed that "...what one was seeking essentially was simply to conceal sex: a screen-discourse, a dispersion avoidance"[38], which, however, was "capable not only of isolating...[the sexual

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[37] Foucault, *An Introduction* 28.

[38] Foucault, *An Introduction* 53.

mosaic].. but of stimulating and provoking it, of forming it into focuses of attention, discourse, and pleasure."[39].

The taboo of not just sexuality but homosexuality, the possibility of confronting a forbidden discourse, makes the story racy, dangerous, thrilling, and "sexy". The result of the sublimation of homosexuality in *Death in Venice* diffuses the blatant perception of homosexual desire, but it likewise makes it all the more palpable and compelling, magnifies its representation, and enhances the "desirability" of the story.

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[39] Foucault, *An Introduction* 73.

Chapter 2: The Gods of Greece

This chapter focuses on the various uses of codification of Greek tradition which dissipate the taboo of homosexual desire in *Death in Venice*. I have limited myself to three foci: 1) the Greek revival in Germany at the time the story was published, 2) the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict, and, finally 3) Platonic codification. What links these three categories is the idea that they are established, canonical discourses, all having their roots in classical culture. Although these themes are significant in themselves, their application also serves to diffuse the homosexuality and sensuousness of the story.

The first strategy which I would like to investigate is the screening of homoeroticism through classical Greek idealization of the young body. Mann was not doing anything unusual or suspicious in making classical allusions in his story, but rather, he was quoting an established, contemporary motif of high culture. Therefore, I would like to give a brief account of the Greek revival in Germany and how it was perceived, to demonstrate why Mann was able to use this as a strategy to contextualize *Death in Venice*.

It is well known that Germany experienced a rebirth of classical culture with Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century. His personal enthusiasm and search for beauty was the seedling for a non-Christian ideal that would affect Germany's - and indeed Europe's - art, architecture, music, and literature for centuries

to come. According to E. M. Butler, Winckelmann's "aesthetic message" was as follows: "The imitation of sensuous beauty in nature and of spiritual beauty in man; the combination of the beautiful and the sublime, of the human and the god-like by means of nobility, simplicity, serenity and greatness; all this could only be attained by studying and imitating the Greeks."[40] His view of art was one that attempted to combine ethics and aesthetics to ennoble the mediocrity of his day; but it was not a Judeo-Christian ethics after which he sought. As Greek tradition is part of a pagan discourse, a discourse that knows not of Christian dualism nor of original sin, it is important for this thesis to stress that Winckelmann believed that "Christianity, with its system of rewards and punishments, had discouraged that highest of Hellenistic values, heroic friendship between men."[41] The revived and prestigious tradition of which he would be the initiator was one in which sensuality and such matters were evaluated differently.

Winckelmann's influence lasted well into the twentieth century, although his concepts were often modified and distorted.[42] In *fin-de-siècle* Germany, the classical ideal, embraced in a time of threatening decline, was extended to a renewal of the German spirit and nationalism. One was trying to revive the "*Hellas in Germanien*"

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[40] E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany: A Study of the Influence exercised by Greek art and poetry over the great German writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Boston: Beacon, 1958) 48.

[41] Henry Hatfield, *Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature: From Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964) 16.

[42] Hatfield 23.

model for life[43] again and thereby glorified antiquity. In his book *Nationalism and Sexuality*, George Mosse states that the Greek revival was used as the basis of manliness, and Winckelmann's Greek sculpture served as a model: "Lithe, supple figures, muscular and harmonious, became the symbols of masculinity, the nation, and its youth"[44]. However, what is significant here, is that these figures were not necessarily supposed to be perceived as sensuous entities. They were to be stripped of their sexuality and homoeroticism, so as to stress their transcendent beauty[45]. The naked figure placed in a pure setting in nature was to represent not nudity, sexuality, or profanity, but rather genuineness[46]. A German (homosexual) journal *Der Eigene*, published by Adolf Brand from 1896 to 1911, attests to this. This journal depicted naked boys in Germanic nature, attempting to advocate "a Greek revival of the ideal of beauty and perfection"[47].

"Winckelmann's (a homosexual himself) Apollonian ideal of Greek beauty was integrated into the bourgeois scheme of values associated with restraint, chastity, and purity"[48]. The classical figures representing these values became an aesthetic stereotype of the

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[43] Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Stilkunst um 1900* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967) 122.

[44] George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 14.

[45] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 31.

[46] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 49.

[47] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 42.

[48] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 30.

Bürger, because they were historical symbols of unchanging values that gave "the appearance of an immutable force that could provide security and shelter"[49] for a "cultural", spiritual, patriarchal nation threatened by the materialistic, effeminate civilization of the modern world.

A natural outgrowth of this classical idealization of the young, healthy male body was the foundation of the German Youth Movement. This movement was started in a Berlin suburb in 1896 by school boys[50]. They stressed nature, sports and health, which were to reflect their inner, moral soundness[51]. However, what started out as an innocent retreat from urban life became a politicized movement, motivated by Eros and organized for the national cause. Mosse writes: "They invoked... the power of male Eros in order to create a true camaraderie-the cell from which the nation might be renewed."[52]. The poet and painter Elisar von Kupffer shared in this view and saw the Greeks as even more than a model for a new movement. Harry Oosterhuis says of Kupffer:

> Kupffer...proposes the revival of a male culture. ... Males should join ranks, youths should be brought into contact with experienced male adults, because it is these relationships...which create the basic elements of state and culture. Kupffer expresses the wish that "*Lieblingsminne*" will regain this social status. Especially in Germany, "*Lieblingsminne*" could contribute to the

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[49] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 15.

[50] Steakley 54.

[51] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 45-46.

[52] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 45.

> strength of the nation, the Germans being the heirs of ancient Greece.[53]

Kupffer did not renounce erotic, sensual activity, but followed the thoughts of Blüher, who believed that homosexual desire in these groups was basically sublimated[54] and redirected for the purpose of the state in the form of the spiritual principles of leadership and camaraderie[55], as mentioned above.

One such *Männerbund*, of which Thomas Mann was well informed, was the Stefan George circle, which was an apollinical patriarchy[56] based on the idea of a "*Jünglingskult*". George, who advocated the admiration of Hellenic culture, believed that male beauty would redeem Germany. He believed that the "beauty of the soul was mirrored in physical beauty" and his Maximin, who died in 1905, became "symbolic of heroic youth - what George called the 'secret Germany' to come"[57].

Another representative of those adulating the young, male body was the photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden, who was a contributor to the "*Wiedererschaffung der griechischen Antike in*

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[53] Harry Oosterhuis, 'Homosocial resistance to Hirschfeld's homosexual putsch: "The *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*', 1899-1914", *Among Men, Among Women: Sociological and historical Recognition of Homosocial Arrangements.* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1983) 306.

[54] Hans Blüher, *Der Typus Inversus* , vol 1. of *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1924) 32.

[55] Blüher, *Der Typus Inversus* 241-243.

[56] Oosterhuis 292.

[57] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* 58.

klassischer Nacktheit"[58]. In his work "*gelangt [es] ein starkes Lebensgefühl zum Ausdruck, gekoppelt mit den für den Symbolismus typischen Elementen des...Antikisierenden in der Verbindung der klassischen Forderung von Wahrheit und Schönheit*"[59]. He became famous in Europe for his photographs of young, naked Sicilian boys adorned with olive branches in provocative and often homoerotic poses.

Not surprisingly, this new classicism with its attention to the form of the body was at times problematic. A substantial amount of Gloeben's work (two-thirds), for instance, was considered pornographic and destroyed[60]. The focus on young, naked bodies invoked suspicions of deviant sexual behavior and some of the *Männerbünde* were even accused of engaging in homosexual activity, sometimes rightly so. But Mosse contends : "Those in Germany who saw the '*Bund*" as the origin of all true states often invoked the power of Eros, the dedicated love between men, but they were also quick to separate such a love from homosexuality."[61] They, like Blüher, saw the homoeroticism as an agent for national renewal; this homoerotic Eros, which according to Blüher is not rationally explainable, naturally came from the ideal in Greek tradition. This concept also influenced Thomas Mann, and, although perhaps

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[58] Ernst Busch, "*Berichte aus New York*", *Das Kunstwerk: Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 30.6 (1977): 80.

[59] "*Apotheose des Jünglings*", Werk/*Archithese: Zeitschrift und Schriftenreihe für Architektur und Kunst*, 31-32. (1979): 90.

[60] Gert Schiff, "The Sun of Taormina" in *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, 9.6. (1979): 199.

[61] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*,87-88.

without Blüher's blatant political edge, its ideal form is represented in *Death in Venice*, as Hans Wißkirchen states: "*So ist dann sein* [Blühers] *und übrigens auch Thomas Manns Ideal der Männerfreundschaft das der Liebe zwischen dem erfahrenen Älteren und dem Schönen und Jungen* "[62].

I now intend to examine a second, general strategy Mann uses to address the homosexual issue in *Death in Venice*: the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict, which is a recurring theme in Mann's work. To begin, I would like to relate this concept to Mann's perception of himself. It may be recalled that Mann struggled with his identity: on the one hand he believed himself to be the true German *Bürger*, inclined to discipline, order and respectability; on the other hand, he knew he was also an artist motivated by Eros and inspired by passion. These two opposing positions are representative of the Nietzschean Apollonian-Dionysian bipolarity and reflect Mann's struggle with their incompatibility. On the one hand we have the rational, disciplined and optimistic Apollonian side, on the other, the Dionysian chaos, formlessness, and destruction,- a dichotomy which finds a parallel in the *bürgerlich* and *anitbürgerlich* impulses of Mann's work. Furthermore, tension of these two opposing life perspectives are constants in his work and consequently a central theme in *Death in Venice*.

Consider some of the many oppositions in the novella: north-south, east-west, health and disease, femininity and masculinity,

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[62] Hans Wißkirchen, "*Republikanischer Eros: Zu Walt Whitmans und Hans Blühers Rolle in der politischen Publizistik Thomas Manns*", *Heimsuchung und süßes Gift: Erotik und Poetik bei Thomas Mann*, ed. Gerhard Härle (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1992) 22.

respectability and decadence, citizen and artist, and finally, the unspoken opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This dualistic paradigm of binary oppositions gave Mann the opportunity to address and criticize the two opposing life perspectives; by utilizing the Nietzschean dichotomy of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Mann was able to introduce a "degenerate" topic like homosexuality and address it within a balanced, established discourse while simultaneously protecting himself.

It is well known that Mann was greatly influenced by Nietzsche, who was the first to formulate the Apollonian/Dionysian argument, and *Death in Venice* resonates with this pagan influence. I would briefly like to review some major points which Nietzsche articulated in *Birth of the Tragedy*, before demonstrating how they relate to *Death in Venice*. Nietzsche claims that western culture began to decline with Socratic philosophy, on which our culture today is still based. Socrates proposed that one can attain beauty through knowledge, that is to say, that in rationalizing the phenomenon of something, one will then be led to see the beauty of the thing. It is through science and understanding that life becomes comprehensible and thus justified, and this use of reason is likewise the means for overcoming fear of death.[63] According to Nietzsche, man in this way believes he possesses limitless power[64] over the rhythms of life by covering his dissonance with a veil of beauty[65], thus rendering all of

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[63] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972) 95, 3. Part 3, vol. 1 of *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe.*

[64] Nietzsche 113.

[65] Nietzsche 151.

life an illusion by imposing form on its Dionysian chaos. He believed this concept of the Apollonian, as a corrective of reality, was created in the fight against this Dionysian formlessness, which is the true rawness of life, a collapse of the Apollonian[66].

Whereas the Apollonian thrives on the *principium individuationis*, the principle of individuation, the Dionysian seeks dispersal into the universal.[67] The individual is destroyed and redeemed through a mystic sense of oneness.[68] Therefore, as self-knowledge, which would be self-affirmation, is the objective of the Apollonian, it is self-abnegation[69] and intoxication which is the goal of the Dionysian. Furthermore, according to the Dionysian principle, it is not the phenomenon of the thing, which is focusing on the rationalization of the thing, but the experience of the thing itself which is the desire for and joy of existence (*Daseinsgier und Daseinslust*)[70] in this tragic, tormenting universe.

Although Nietzsche's polarity was first formulated in relation to art in Western culture, particularly tragedy, I intend to apply it to a particular paradigm of this culture, namely the dualism of heterosexuality and homosexuality. For the sake of analogy, I will consider heterosexuality to be the Apollonian, and homosexuality to be the Dionysian counterpart. Let us first consider the question of

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[66] Nietzsche 24.

[67] Nietzsche 24.

[68] Nietzsche 26.

[69] Nietzsche 26.

[70] Nietzsche 105.

desire and rationality. As patriarchy would have us believe, Apollonian heterosexual desire is socially rational and moral, because it has a purpose, that of procreation. When speaking of heterosexuality in these terms, the concern is not of a philosophical question of desire, but rather of a cognitive, concrete phenomena that can be rationalized and legitimized, or at the very least directed. In other words, men desire women, because they together, in accordance with Judeo-Christian tradition, will procreate to perpetuate the species. Here the will behind reproduction is survival of the species.[71] It is a scientifically provable phenomenon that children will be produced through this process and, desire, therefore, is in sense socially justifiable and legitimate. But this does not explain desire; it only directs, controls, and legitimizes heterosexual behavior, thereby making the desire itself seem rational. The universal question of "desire" has been put into an Apollonian discourse by assigning a specific, identifiable and rational phenomenon to it. The dark abyss of the death of the species is thus protected through Apollonian victory over homosexuality, the result of which is the illusion of limitless power over desire.

Thomas Mann, too, speaks of the Apollonian illusion of heterosexual love, arguing that the "*Liebesillusion*" is "*nur ein Trick der Verführung, ein Mittel zur ihren fertilen Zweck*"[72]. Social order and stability are believed to be secured through the resulting family,

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[71] Arthur Schopenhauer, "*Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe*", vol. 3, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung II* of *Sämtliche Werke* (Mannheim: F.U. Brockhaus, 1988) 612.

[72] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" vol. 10 of *Thomas Mann: Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden* (Oldenburg: S. Fischer, 1960) 197.

directed and anchored by the structure of the Apollonian institution. This is why Mann calls heterosexual love "*gründende Liebe*"[73]. He claims its "*menschliche Unternehmung*"[74] and *"zur gründenden Verwirklichung des Gefühls und des Traumes im Leben* [to have children live on in the legacy of their parents]*ist die psychologische Formel aller Sittlichkeit und Sozialität...*"[75] In this manner, heterosexuality is associated with the sphere of ethics.

Homosexuality, on the other hand, is not driven by such a socially rational impetus and therefore not socially legitimized in this way. The reason for its being is scientifically-philosophically inexplicable and unjustifiable because it has no social role, as far as nature is concerned, and no moral value, as far as ethics is concerned. Indeed Mann himself states in his essay "*Über die Ehe*" about homosexuality: "*Sie ist 'freie' Liebe im Sinn der Unfruchtbarkeit, Aussichtslosigkeit, Konsequenz- und Verantwortungslosigkeit. Es entsteht nichts aus ihr, sie legt den Grund zu nichts, ist 'l'art pour l'art', was ästhetisch recht stolz und frei sein mag, doch ohne Zweifel unmoralisch ist.*"[76] Homosexuality embodies the means to undermine the nuclear family and indeed challenges the Apollonian order. We could conclude, that since it has no socially rational, moral, or productive purpose, this kind of desire has no place in the Apollonian life and must be associated with the Dionysian.

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[73] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 202, 206.

[74] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 202

[75] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 202

[76] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 197.

However, Mann creates the possibility of integrating the homosexual desire of *Death in Venice* into the Apollonian framework through a model of aesthetics. Homosexuality, according to Mann, cannot be compared or judged in relation to heterosexuality; they have a very different basis and must be evaluated separately. Homosexuality is associated with the sphere of aestheticism because it is driven by Eros and bound to "*Schönheit*"; he relates this to the ancient Platonic model of love:

> [Heterosexual desire is] "*die Gegenformel zu jenem metaphysischen Individualismus, der als Auflösung der sittlichen Lebensform, als orgiastische Befreiung davon zu begreifen ist, und dem erotisch die ästhetisierend-sterile Knabenliebe entspricht.*"[77]

As far as this thesis is concerned, this aesthetisized Platonic love between men can be representative of the Apollonian spirit for two reasons: it must take on a very rigid form, and there is a sense of social and moral purpose in such a relationship, albeit different from that of heterosexuality. First of all, there were strict rules as to who was able to engage in such a relationship in terms of age, intelligence and social standing.[78] Those who did not abide by such rules were considered debased and lowly and were ostracized. Moreover, the way on which an older man was to approach a young boy "demanded a special stylistics"[79] and was based on strict rules of courting. There were certain rituals and ceremonies to be followed, which amounted

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[77] Thomas Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 202

[78] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage, 1990) 193.

[79] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 192.

to a flirtatious game with very stringent codes of behavior. In this sense, the form of the process was indeed very rigorous and had to be upheld to render dignity and honor to the pursuit, and make the relationship between older men and *paidika*, "one that was aesthetically and morally valuable"[80].

The second stipulation which makes Platonic love an Apollonian kind of love is that fact that physical love and desire, although substantial and significant elements of "Platonic love", were ideally considered only the means to a higher end, because the attraction between a man and a boy was perceived as the path to an absolute truth. Harry Oosterhuis writes of this kind of transcendent love, which was inspired by the heavenly Aphrodite[81]:

> Whereas love between man and woman is justified by physical procreation, the homo-erotic relationship is justified by the aspiration after unity between body and soul, by the satisfaction of Eros: the longing for beauty and perfection.[82]

Indeed, Socrates warns of the dangers of lust, which debase, distort, and eventually dissolve Platonic love, since lust blinds a lover from the spiritual truth to be attained by Platonic love. Lustful abandon, unharnessed passion and chaotic desire, which for the purposes of this thesis are associated with the Dionysian spirit and assigned to the effeminate, "pathological" homosexual as opposed to aesthetisized

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[80] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 196.

[81] Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, Trans. Cormac ò Cuilleanàin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 59.

[82] Oosterhuis 310.

homosexual, must be controlled, so that one can achieve the spiritual ascent, of which only men were considered to be worthy. Furthermore, the Platonic relationship was seen as a test of morality and a determination of personal ethical substance[83], as well as education for the boys who would later become important statesmen. Expanding on this idea, Ernest Borneman believes it was seen as a social phenomenon and a"*Klassenphänomen, das in Athen den Zugang zu den führenden Positionen im Staatswesen, der Wirtschaft, der Philosophie und der Künste regelte*".[84] Once more, love between men is rationalized, given a purpose, a strict form and justified, which is evocative of the Apollonian principle.

I would now like to investigate how the Apollonian-Dionysian bipolarity relates to Aschenbach in general. Let us compare some of his Apollonian and likewise some of his Dionysian qualities, which are clearly in constant battle with one another. First, as the Apollonian Aschenbach, he is driven by illusion in many ways. He is the Apollonian ascetic with a closed fist, restrained, free of emotion, free of excess: "*...so bedurfte er höchlich der Zucht, - und Zucht war ja zum Glücke sein eingeborenes Erbteil von väterlicher Seite. ...[Er] begann...seinen Tag beizeiten mit Stürzen kalten Wassers über Brust und Rücken...*"(452). He did not even indulge in the frivolity of youth: "*So, schon als Jüngling von allen Seiten auf die Leistung - und zwar die außerordentliche - verpflichtet, hatte er niemals den*

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[83] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 26.

[84] Ernest Borneman, *Das Patriarchat: Ursprung und Zukunft unseres Gesellschaftssystems* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Taschenbuch , 1975) 280.

Müßiggang, niemals die sorglose Fahrlässigkeit der Jugend gekannt" (451).

He has always lived a disciplined life and, in doing so, believes he has control over the Dionysian elements in life which are unacceptable in his society. His motto is Frederick the Great's "*Durchhalten*", which already implies the need to persevere, as if some force were acting against him, a force that needs to be controlled, in order to be virtuous. The narrator explains: "*Aber sein Lieblingswort war 'Durchhalten',-er sah in seinem Friedrich-Roman nichts anderes als die Apotheose dieses Befehlswortes, das ihm als der Inbegriff leidend-tätiger Tugend erschien.*" (451).

Most importantly, as an advocate of the Apollonian spirit, he is the new classicist who can rationalize his existence and conduct, which he does not wish to acknowledge is deviant. "*Aschenbach, der als der Vertreter eines neuen Klassizismus beschrieben wird und einer Kultur der Vernunft angehört,*"[85] believes he can explain his (homosexual) desire for Tadzio by using the Greek tradition of Platonic love between the *erastes* and the *eromenos* (older suitor and younger suited) to legitimize his Dionysian intoxication. By taking on the role of Socrates and assigning the role of Phaidros to Tadzio, Aschenbach fantasizes a dialogue from the *Symposium* as a way of trying to understand his attraction to the boy's physical form. He reflects on Socrates philosophy of love, beauty and truth, pondering:

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[85] Rolf Günter Renner, *Das Ich als ästhetische Konstruktion: 'Der Tod in Venedig' und seine Beziehung zum Gesamtwerk Thomas Manns.* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1987) 71.

> *So auch bediente sich der Gott [Amor] sich, um uns das Geistige sichtbar zu machen, gern der Gestalt und Farbe menschlicher Jugend, die er zum Werkzeug der Erinnerung mit allem Abglanz der Schönheit schmückte...*(491).

He continues:

> *...nur mit Hilfe eines Körpers vermöge [die Seele] dann noch zu höherer Betrachtung sich zu erheben.(491) So ist die Schönheit der Weg des Fühlenden zum Geist, -nur der Weg, ein Mittel nur, kleiner Phaidros...*(492)

Aschenbach interprets Socrates and believes that external beauty is a reflection of the *Geist*, and, as Socrates expounded, in reaching the *Geist* of a person, the worldly form can be seen as a manifestation of that *Geist*. This is what Aschenbach believes has happened with Tadzio. Through Tadzio's beautiful physical form, Aschenbach thinks he has witnessed the boy's *Geist* and thus seen Beauty. Through explaining and rationalizing this phenomenon and concentrating on the phenomenon of the desire and not on the desire itself, Aschenbach creates an illusion and subsequently eludes the universal question of desire. This deceives Aschenbach into believing that he has limitless power over the phenomenon of desire, which, of course, his Dionysian dream in the end proves he does not. The optimistic dialectic of Socrates makes him believe that he can correct his decadent, deviant existence by explaining it[86], essentially by finding a pretense. What he actually does is simply displace the

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[86] Nietzsche 85.

erotic energy into a conventionally accepted discourse, so as to render it legitimate.

Now the Dionysian is the *Fremde*, the element from the outside. This concept is illustrated in the several binary oppositions in *Death in Venice* and reflects the vain Apollonian attempt to distinguish itself from the Dionysian. If Aschenbach's discipline and restraint symbolize the Apollonian in him, then his proclivity to excess, chaos, formlessness, and eventually destruction, is representative of the Dionysian counterpart. But "*Die Gleichsetzung des Dionysoszuges mit dem Vordringen der Cholera asiatica nach Europa und die Parallelisierung dieses Vorgangs mit der Gefühlsentwicklung Aschenbachs sind ... nur das zentrale Motiv*"[87] of the duality of the two perspectives. In reality though, the Dionysian has always been a part of Aschenbach, and only his acceptance of *Zucht* has made him think that he could defend himself from it. A controlled discourse has decided who he should be, and he followed, believing this element in him to be foreign, when it was really only repressed. He rationalizes his feelings by believing in the illusion he and society have created for himself, particularly the illusion that he does not physically desire the boy. Nietzsche stated that man tries to cover his dissonance with a veil of beauty, and this becomes obvious when the Apollonian Aschenbach tries to justify his self-worth and put structure to the disintegrating form of his life. When he feels himself falling prey to the Dionysian in him, he thinks simultaneously about

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[87] Renner 73.

his upright ancestors and what they would say of his ignoble conduct:

> *Er dachte ihrer auch jetzt und hier, verstrickt in ein so unstatthaftes Erlebnis, begriffen in so exotischen Ausschweifungen des Gefühls, gedachte der haltungsvollen Strenge, der anständigen Männlichkeit ihres Wesens und lächelte schwermütig. Was würden sie sagen? Aber freilich, was hätten sie zu seinem ganzen Leben gesagt, das von dem ihren so bis zur Entartung abgewichen war, zu diesem Leben im Banne der Kunst...* (503-504).

His struggle with his behavior is evident in his self-defense. He consoles himself in the thought that he, like his forefathers, was a respectable man who served as a soldier, a soldier, however, in the war of "*Kunst*": "*Auch er hatte gedient, auch er war Soldat und Kriegsmann gewesen...*"(504), and then he meditates on Eros: "*Hatte er nicht bei den tapfersten Völkern vorzüglich in Ansehen gestanden, ja hieß es nicht, daß er durch Tapferkeit in ihren Städten geblüht habe*?" (504). But in desperation he must nevertheless attempt to redeem himself: "*...so suchte er sich zu stützen, seine Würde zu wahren.*"(504). And just as he tries to conceal the general Apollonian-Dionysian conflict of his identity through acting dignified, he also attempts to conceal the specific struggle with his sexuality and put Apollonian form and order to his desire through a Greek discourse on aestheticism, thus hiding the repressed truth and covering it with a respectable, even beautiful, noble veil.

However, Aschenbach's illusion of himself is being destroyed because he submits to his Dionysian counterpart. His identity, which, according to Socrates, is supposed to be acquired through self-

knowledge, is shattered. He is no longer the respectable, heterosexual man of virtue he thought he was. "*Selbst die 'seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern', die Aschenbach empfindet, läßt sich als Anspielung auf eine dionysische Ekstasis ansehen.*"[88]. The Dionysian in him breaks through.

The reader sees Aschenbach's Apollonian structure crumbling when he contemplates approaching Tadzio. He does not wish to know why he wanted to nor why he finally did not speak to the boy:

> *Aschenbach war zur Selbstkritik nicht mehr aufgelegt; der Geschmack, die geistige Verfassung seiner Jahre, Selbstachtung, Reife und späte Einfachheit machten ihn nicht geneigt, Beweggründe zu zergliedern und zu entscheiden, ob er aus Gewissen, ob aus Liederlichkeit und Schwäche sein Vorhaben nicht ausgefürht habe.* (494)

As the story develops further, Aschenbach gives up his self-reflection and becomes more and more estranged from his formulated and constructed identity. The narrator mediates Aschenbach's thoughts: "*...wer außer sich ist, verabscheut nichts mehr, als wieder in sich zu gehen*" (515). Aschenbach can no longer be what he wanted to be, what society forced him to be. The repressed Dionysian truth has overcome the Apollonian facade, to which there is no return for Aschenbach. "*Sein Geist kreißte, seine Bildung geriet ins Wallen...*" (490). His heterosexual "*Bildung*" , his own painful, virtuous, Apollonian construct, is losing the battle against the true, formless Dionysian interior of his psyche and soul.

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[88] Renner 69.

Any identity Aschenbach formerly had has now vanished into the universal. This becomes evident in Aschenbach's dream:

> *[Die Geschehnisse] gingen hindurch und ließen seine Existenz, ließen die Kultur seines Lebens verheert, vernichtet zurück*"(516); "*..mit ihnen, in ihnen war der Träumende nun und dem fremden Gotte gehörig. Ja, sie waren er selbst...*(517).

Even his physical identity changes, when he goes to the hotel's cosmetician. His corporeal transformation and "feminization" is an attestation to and physical manifestation of the internal transformation Aschenbach is succumbing to.

The narrator's simple comment on Aschenbach's approaching defeat and his yielding to the chaos of the Dionysian spirit is the fulcrum of the novel: "*Was galt ihm noch Kunst und Tugend gegenüber den Vorteilen des Chaos*?" (515). Aschenbach renounces the virtues of the Apollonian life he had formerly known, he realizes he is enthralled by excess, by the sensuousness of life, its ugly truth, its pain and suffering and, finally, in the Dionysian joy of its existence. He thinks to himself:

> *...wenn er bei sinkendem Tage durch Gassen, in denen verheimlichterweise das ekle Sterben umging, ihm* [Tadzio] *unwürdig nachfolgte, so schien das Ungeheuerliche ihm aussichtsreich und hinfällig das Sittengesetz.* (518)

Nietzsche's claim that the Dionysian possesses a *Daseinslust* is apparent in Aschenbach, as the youth becomes his reason to live, his ecstasy, even if it means he must pay for it with his life. That moment of ecstasy, that *Vollkommenheit*, is the intoxicating *Daseinslust* of the Dionysian standing on the edge of the abyss, into

which he knows he will fall, and does so willingly after having witnessed the rawness of life behind the "*Schein*" of life. Aschenbach muses:

> *Standbild und Spiegel! Seine Augen umfaßten die edle Gestalt dort an Rande des Blauen, und in aufschwärmendem Entzücken glaubte er mit diesem Blick das Schöne selbst zu begreifen, die Form als Gottesgedanken, die eine und reine Vollkommenheit, die im Geiste lebt und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war. Das war der Rausch; und unbedenklich, ja gierig hieß der alternde Künstler ihn willkommen.* (490).

Aschenbach can no longer move between the two poles; he is experiencing the irreconcilability of these two opposing life forces and eventually succumbs to one, for the Apollonian identity he constructed for himself, can no longer repress his sexuality, as evident in his orgiastic, Dionysian dream, in which the intoxicated masses are howling a drawn-out u-sound that is evocative of the name Tadzio's family calls him: "*Aus diesem Traum erwachte der Heimgesuchte entnervt, zerrüttet und kraftlos dem Dämon verfallen.*" (517).

We have seen how Mann utilized references to Greek tradition to legitimize and diffuse the homosexuality in his story. Mann was able to transport homoeroticism in his story because Hellenistic idealization of the beautiful youth was a legitimized motif of contemporary *Bildung*. Likewise, by referring to Nietzsche's polarity of the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, he was able to formulate the discussion of a taboo topic via an authoritative figure and an established philosophical scheme.

Death in Venice also uses another aspect "of the chief motifs found in the German literature thematizing homosexuality", ..."homosexual relationships...related to those formed in ancient Greece"[89]. This last reference to Greek tradition is the most specific, visible and viable diffusing strategy: the employment of Greek aestheticism in the form of a discourse on Platonic love. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, using the prestige of Greek tradition as a strategy to displace the representation of pathological, homoeroticism results in heightening Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio, as well as softening it. I would now like to focus on the diffusing effects of this strategy.

One of the most effective ways the homosexuality of the story can be transfigured is the way in which Aschenbach perceives Tadzio's physical beauty. Throughout the story he likened to Greek marble figures. Aschenbach describes the intoxication in seeing this god-like figure:

> *...die Haut seines Gesichtes stach weiß wie Elfenbein gegen das goldige Dunkel der umrahmenden Locken ab.*(470). *...und zu sehen, wie die lebendige Gestalt, vormännlich hold und herb, mit triefenden Locken und schön wie ein zarter Gott, herkommend aus den Tiefen von Himmel und Meer, dem Elemente entstieg und entrann...*(478) *Sonne und Seeluft verbrannten ihn nicht, seine Haut war marmorhaft ...geblieben wie zu Beginn...*(498)

Aschenbach distances himself from Tadzio by placing him on a different level. Aschenbach idealizes and idolizes the boy:

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[89] Jones 282.

> *Sein Antlitz, bleich und anmutig verschlossen, von honigfarbenem Haar umringelt, mit der gerade abfallenden Nase, dem lieblichen Munde, dem Ausdruck von holdem und göttlichem Ernst, erinnerte an griechische Bildwerke aus edelster Zeit*...(469).

But Tadzio soon becomes that work of art, without passion in itself, just an inspiration to reproduce its beauty. In this sense, he appears to become desexualized because he is dehumanized or made into an immortal figure and his immateriality dissolves his sex. All worldly, physical traits are raised to a god-like level that move on a different plane. Aschenbach ironically tries to make him untouchable, but his attempt at abstracting the boy to mere idea is not convincing. The reader is skeptical and oscillates, because he can see through Aschenbach's facade. In the end Tadzio remains the same sensuous boy Aschenbach first encountered.

Furthermore, not only is Tadzio's material body dissolved, his identity is also dispersed. Aschenbach, who ironically never even speaks to the child and therefore cannot achieve the epiphany of Beauty in a Socratic sense through him, further attempts to reduce Tadzio's worldly identity by elevating him to mythological and classical status through metaphors and analogies. He perceives him as the *Dornzieher* (470), *Phäake* (473), Eros (474), Phaidros (491); he makes allusions to Hermes, the *Psychogog* (525), and *Narziß* (498). Supporting this hypothesis, Inta Miske Ezergailis comments: "To see a mythical figure beyond an actual one is to reduce the individual value of the latter, though it may increase his stature."[90] After some

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[90] Inta Miske Ezergailis, *Male and Female: An Approach to Thomas Mann's Dialectic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975) 56.

time, Tadzio even begins to lose his name. He becomes *der Abgott* (499), *der Schöne* (501), *der Ausgezeichnete* (489), *der Liebhaber* (507), *das Begehrte* (502). The irony of it all, is that Aschenbach does not see the youth for whom he is, but rather as Aschenbach would prefer to see him, to legitimize his feelings. Again, the "real", worldly Tadzio is in this sense minimized, because he becomes the classic "*Objektwahl*", a mere symbol with no self-identity to the reader. Tadzio is no longer depicted as a human being with sexual capacity, he is merely an idea now, an idea Aschenbach constructed and an idea after which he lusts. The Socratic progression from Eros and physical love to absolute Beauty and Truth has not taken place; instead: "*Seltsam zeugender Verkehr des Geistes mit einem Körper!*"(493).

We are aware of the conflicting perspectives about homosexuality at the turn of the century in Western culture and Mann's problems with their manifestation. This is reflected in the story and may be demonstrated through Aschenbach struggles with the contradictions between the ideal sexuality of the Greek tradition and the condemned, pathological homosexuality associated with "decadence" and "degeneracy". I had attempted earlier to place the dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality within the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm and compared them in terms of socially rational and socially irrational desire. We can further deconstruct the Apollonian and Dionysian counterparts once again: ideal, Greek love vs. decadent, pathological homosexual lust. Mann's application of Greek tradition can be seen as a part of Nietzschean

dualism of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as an attempt on Aschenbach's part to restore Apollonian structure in the form of justifiable Platonic love, to his dissolving, ever more formless Dionysian life to correct his existence, by rationalizing his desire.

In general Mann utilizes classical references to put form to his decadent story and to lend dignity to Aschenbach's cause. Robert Martin notes: "The multiplied classical references, to Greek sculpture, to Hermes, to Eros, to Ganymede, provide a lineage that stands in sharp contrast to Aschenbach's internalized sense of social destruction and decay."[91]

More importantly, though, Mann uses the Platonic dialogue from the *Symposium* to lend form and structure to Aschenbach's desire, as the Greeks used the structure of Platonic love to "give form to their behavior"[92]. Aschenbach takes on the role of Socrates and pretends that he is having a dialogue with Tadzio as Phaidros. Aschenbach is literally trying to fight the Dionysian life force by pretending that he can rationalize and therefore authorize the source of his desire. This is his attempt to screen his desire, justify his passion, his attempt to legitimize his feelings and actions in self-defense. He is trying to put classical form to a chaotic passion, in order to save himself from it, but the reader recognizes that this also serves as a sublimating device for homosexuality, which eventually fails him.

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[91] Robert K. Martin, "Gender, Sexuality, and Identity in Mann's Short Fiction", *Approaches to Teaching 'Death in Venice' and Other Short Fiction*, ed Jeffrey Berlin (New York: MLA, 1992) 65.

[92] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 23.

As mentioned above, according to Socrates, one can achieve a state of elevated comprehension by perceiving the true form hidden behind the earthly appearance of the image. It is in this way that Aschenbach believes he has seen true Beauty through Tadzio. However, Susan von Rohr Scaff writes that Aschenbach does not distinguish between the spiritual beauty and the sensuous image.[93] According to Plato, there must be such a differentiation, for the rational apprehension of spiritual beauty and truth is a result of the raising oneself above the earthly, physical attraction. This is where Aschenbach fails in his attempt to legitimize his desire, because he misinterprets or misuses Socrates' concepts in a doomed attempt at self-preservation. Aschenbach, in fact, does not succeed in ascending to an "abstract and higher comprehension of beauty", that is to say succeed in sublimating his desire; he simply revels in lust, which Plato stated distracts the true lover from seeing the spiritual beauty. It is not having seen Beauty itself which moves him, as he would like to believe, but rather his sensual desire. Aschenbach's sublimation scheme fails him in practice because he never makes that Platonic ascent to and experiences the epiphany of a higher truth, and the reader may feel he is deplorable:

> Aschenbach's passion, unlike...true Platonic lovers, abandons the life of intellectual mastery, succumbing instead to Dionysian lust. As he trails Tadzio through the streets, his behavior is lascivious and despicable, not elevating and worthy.[94]

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[93] Susan von Rohr Scaff, "Plato and Nietzsche in *'Death in Venice", Approaches to Teaching 'Death in Venice' and Other Short Fiction*, ed. Jeffrey Berlin (New York: MLA, 1992) 142.

[94] Rohr Scaff 143.

Indeed, Aschenbach does not only not reach Tadzio's *Geist* to elevate him, he ironically never even speaks to Tadzio.

Because Aschenbach is unable to attain that higher, abstract state, his motives for pursuing the boy become increasingly desublimated, obsessive, and pathological. For without the "Platonic" ascent, Aschenbach's desire can only be attributed to lust. Thus, the Socratic veil of illusion has been lifted to expose the true, formless, physical, Dionysian desire and passion felt for Tadzio. Any chance to lend "dignity" to his desire vanishes, as Aschenbach's constructed identity vanished.

This demise is apparent in Aschenbach's inability to produce any substantial creative writing. At one point he ponders:

> *Aber an diesem Punkte der Krisis war die Erregung des Heimgesuchten auf Produktion gerichtet. Fast gleichgültig der Anlaß. ...sein Gelüst, ihn im Licht seines Wortes erglänzen zu lassen, auf einmal unwiderstehlich. Und zwar ging sein Verlangen dahin, in Tadzio's Gegenwart zu arbeiten, beim Schreiben den Wuchs des Knaben zum Muster zu nehmen, seinen Stil den Linien dieses Körpers folgen zu lassen, der ihm göttlich schien, und seine Schönheit ins Geistige zu tragen, wie der Adler einst den troischen Hirten zum Äther trug. Nie hatte er die Lust des Wortes süßer empfunden, nie so gewußt, daß Eros im Worte sei..."*(492).

Aschenbach wanted to believe he could use the drive of Eros to motivate his intellectual and creative process[95], to take the *Geist*

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[95] Werner Deuse, "*Besonders ein antikisierendes Kapitel scheint mir gelungen':Griechisches in 'Der Tod in Venedig'*", *Heimsuchung und süßes Gift: Erotik und Poetik bei Thomas Mann*, ed. Gerhard Härle (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1992) 55.

behind the beautiful, worldly form of the boy and transfigure it into a literary form. The reader awaits a monumental piece inspired by such intense passion and Eros, but the narrator imparts, that Aschenbach, ironically enough, managed to produce only one and one half pages of prose. He tried to sublimate his desire in thought and sublimate his potential action in writing, however, his attempt to redirect his erotic energy into his writing fails and instead of witnessing art inspired by Eros, the reader sees still only Eros in the end.

Although the Platonic strategy fails Aschenbach as described above, it is still serves Mann, because it is a viable device for diffusing homosexuality. What is important for this paper is the idea that the Platonic reference allowed Mann to address a taboo subject and imbed it in an established and prestigious tradition. Similarly, a discourse on homosexuality could also be incorporated in the Nietzschean dualism of Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Finally, the Greek revival in Wilhelmine Germany at the time of the publication of *Death in Venice* allowed Mann to use a contemporary motif to contextualize the story. Now that we have considered the historical and philosophical background that gave Mann the opportunity to address yet sublimate homosexual desire in his story, I would like to investigate the textual elements which embody homosexuality yet diffuse it through codification in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Freud, or Sublimation

Freud postulated that suppression of instincts, particularly sexual instincts, is the basis of normal functioning in society. One way in which this sexual instinct is controlled is through sublimation, that is, displacing a sexual aim through another psychically related aim, "*ohne wesentlich an Intensität abzunehmen*"[96]. We witnessed this phenomenon with the character Aschenbach and his attempt to sublimate his desire. On the literary level now, this chapter entails a textual analysis to reveal the myriad instances of sublimation of homosexual desire that manifest themselves in the imagery of *Death in Venice* in symbols, metaphors and codification, as intensely as the original, uncodified desire. I will limit this discussion to four categories: 1) cholera as a metaphor for homosexuality, 2) travel as a symbol of pursuit for sexual freedom, 3) codification of repression, and 4) symbols of homosexuality associated with Aschenbach's fixation of the mouth. The symbols being examined are ambivalent, like the story itself, in that they simultaneously represent what they claim to, while also serving as metaphors for homosexuality and devices that mask Aschenbach's internal conflict with this issue.

I would first like to examine the parallels between cholera and homosexuality in *Death in Venice*. The first indication that the two may be linked is their "foreign" origin. Like the Dionysian "*Fremder*",

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[96] Sigmund Freud, vol. 7 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1941) 150. All further references to Freud's work are to this edition of collected works cited as (GWSF).

the cholera have their roots in India. Both the Dionysian spirit and the disease are outside elements which come in to Europe and take over that space, like the repressed feelings of homosexual desire which invade Aschenbach's consciousness. Aschenbach considers the epidemic and consequences it has on Venice:

> *...die gewerbsmäßige Liederlichkeit nahm aufdringliche und ausschweifende Formen an, wie sie sonst hier nicht bekannt und nur im Süden des Landes und im Orient zu Hause gewesen waren.*(514).

However, the most intriguing comparison is that the epidemic and its infection in the environs of Venice are to be kept clandestine. No one volunteers to provide a definitive explanation for what is happening in terms of public health and the threatened condition of Venice. The "authorities" give pretenses and practice the policy of silence(513-514). Most importantly, they do not name the disease; just as homosexual love was a love that dared not speak its name, the officials did not want to identify the cholera as such, for in doing so, they would have acknowledged its existence and power to break down Apollonian order.

The narrator specifically refers to Aschenbach's suspicion of the disease as "his secret". Yet the reader can see that there is more to the secret than just cholera. As Aschenbach thinks about the dirty city and reads about the departure of tourists in the newspaper, Aschenbach affirms: "*Man soll schweigen*!" (500). He contemplates the thrill of being a part of this adventure, which he believes other people are unaware of, and immediately entertains a thought about

passion that stands in sharp contrast to and forewarns of the disintegration of his usual bourgeois, patriarchal position:

> *Denn der Leidenschaft ist, wie dem Verbrechen, die gesicherte Ordnung und Wohlfahrt des Alltags nicht gemäß, und jede Lockerung des bürgerlichen Gefüges, jede Verwirrung und Heimsuchung der Welt muß ihr willkommen sein, weil sie ihren Vorteil dabei zu finden unbestimmt hoffen kann.*(500)

The narrator continues:

> *So empfand Aschenbach eine dunkle Zufriedenheit über die obrigkeitlich bemäntelten Vorgänge in den schmutzigen Gäßchen Venedigs, - dieses schlimme Geheimnis der Stadt, das mit seinem eigensten Geheimnis verschmolz, und an dessen Bewahrung auch ihm so sehr gelegen war.*(500-501)

This attests to the reader's suspicion that Aschenbach is concealing something beyond the physical *malaise*. As Aschenbach tries to hide what he knows about the epidemic, he likewise is unwilling to divulge his homosexual desire for Tadzio. "*Man soll schweigen!...Ich werde schweigen!*"(515). Furthermore, the way in which the narrator describes the infectious disease as being denied and covered up can be applied to Aschenbach's sexual identity: "*...denn geleugnet und vertuscht fraß das Sterben in der Enge der Gäßchen um sich...*"(513). Edward Timms demonstrates this parallel and its potential consequence by stating that: "disease and sexuality are conceived as atavistic forces, threatening to destroy a civilization governed by repression and the denial of knowledge"[97]. As the

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[97] Edward Timms, "'Death in Venice' as Psychohistory", *Approaches to Teaching 'Death in Venice' and Other Short Fiction*, ed. Jeffrey Berlin (New York: MLA, 1992) 138.

powerful, fatal disease is disavowed, so is Aschenbach's sexual orientation; the consequence of both lead to his death, one physically, the other psychologically and emotionally.

Mann uses the same imagery to describe the topography of the foreign land in Aschenbach's thoughts about the origin and trip of the cholera from India, as he did in Aschenbach's first day dream in the cemetery in Munich, before any reference to cholera has been made in the text: lush vegetation, bamboo trees, creeping tigers (477 and 512). Thus, cholera and homosexuality are also textually connected through their link with Dionysian topographies and spaces.

Another parallel becomes apparent when the reader acknowledges that both cholera and homosexuality were considered pathological conditions at this time. Medicalization of homosexuality was a contemporary preoccupation of psychologists, sexologists, and pseudo-physicians alike who posited sexually pathological conditions like homosexuality in a biological category. Sander Gilman writes:

> Homosexuality, by the close of the nineteenth century in the work of Krafft-Ebing, Tarnowski, Moll, and others, was generally understood as an innate, biological error, which not only manifested itself in 'perverted' acts, but was written on the very body of the homosexual through the appearance of very specific, visible signs[98],

like the decay of cholera, which left emaciated, blackened corpses in its wake. Moreover, what was said of those infected with the Asian disease, may also be applicable to pathological homosexuals: "*Fälle*

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[98] Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS.* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 174.

der Genesung waren Selten"(513), which is poignant to Aschenbach's case.

Reminiscent of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm, the narrator strategically describes Venice as a city losing form and morality because of the cholera. The city is tending towards a corrupt, Dionysian state, which is evocative of the narrator's simile between passion and crime, and describes the view the bourgeois had of the atmosphere of the homosexual lifestyle. Mann writes in the last chapter of the story:

> *...die Korruption...brachte eine gewisse Entsittlichung der unteren Schichten hervor, eine Ermutigung lichtsheuer und antisozialer Triebe, die sich in Unmäßigkeit, Schamlosigkeit und wachsender Kriminalität bekundete.*(514)

The narrator depicts the drunks on the streets at night, the malicious riff-raff who made the streets unsafe, the personages, traits and events which remind of the degenerate society to which the pathological homosexual belonged. "Homosexuals were thought to live in an artificial world, which whether associated with urbanism or the decadence, signaled a criminal temperament"[99] and this is why they were identified as criminals[100]. The vocabulary used to depict the social breakdown because of the epidemic could simultaneously describe the bourgeois image of the decadent homosexual lifestyle.

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[99] Mosse, "Race and Sexuality" 287.

[100] Mosse, "Race and Sexuality" 287.

However, as mentioned in the last chapter, the Dionysian, the seemingly foreign element that came in from the outside has actually always been a component of Aschenbach's pathological, homosexual psyche, a part that has merely been repressed by himself and society. We could feasibly view Aschenbach as a pathological homosexual and James Jones points out that:

> Mann's presentation of homosexuality would seem to correspond with that theory most clearly formulated by the Freudian school. It evinces several characteristics which fit that model: narcissistic love, a link to the pathological, and an expression of repressed sexuality.[101]

In his "*Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*" Freud propounds a sympathetic view of the homosexual which we can relate to Aschenbach; he claims of homosexuality that it is found in people "*deren Leistungsfähigkeit nicht gestört ist, ja, die sich durch besonders hohe intellektuelle Entwicklung und ethische Kultur auszeichnen*" (GWSF.5.37). Aside from our general perception of Aschenbach's character, there are a few occasions in the text that allude to this condition. For instance, the narrator informs the reader of Aschenbach's youth: his discipline, his sense of duty, his lack of frivolity as a child. The narrator continues to explain that Aschenbach was a special child: sickly, lonely and an extremely talented child - of rare breed. This is evocative of the way another sexologist described homosexuals at the turn of the century. Havelock Ellis wrote: "Sexual inversion has high significance in part because it tends to occur in individuals that are above the average

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[101] Jones 280.

in intellect and character..."[102] and that "a large number of inverts...are usually refined, sensitive, or emotional"[103]. This pathological depiction of the homosexual would seem to describe Aschenbach as a child and stands in contrast to the idealized form of the Greek tradition and the classical ideal of manliness, as well as patriarchal gender norms, that Aschenbach seemed to adopt and uphold as a repressed adult.

Indeed, the ambivalent references to repression linking Aschenbach to a homosexual orientation are numerous. As a matter of fact, Finck claims that *Death in Venice* is the first work, in which Mann addresses the psychoanalytic dilemma of repression.[104] Let us turn to the text to identify some of these passages. Assuming that Aschenbach is a homosexual who has had to repress his homosexual desire and sublimate his sexual energy, he appears to fit the Freudian model of repression rather well. According to Freud:

> *...Verdrängung und Unbewußtes seinen in so großem Ausmaße korrelativ, daß wir die Vertiefung in das Wesen der Verdrängung aufschieben müssen, bis wir mehr von dem Aufbau des psychischen Instanzenzuges und der Differenzierung von Unbewußt und Bewußt erfahren haben.*(GWSF.10.250)

We could assume that this idea being repressed is Aschenbach's homosexual inclination. Freud then continues on the process of repression and its consequences:

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[102] Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex: A Manual for Students.* (New York: Emerson, 1964) 237-238.

[103] Ellis 240.

[104] Jean Finck, *Thomas Mann und die Psychoanalyse.* (Liège: Bibliotheque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université d Liège, 1973) 70.

> *Ja, es kann...die ursprüngliche Triebrepräsentanz in zwei Stücke zerlegt worden sein, von denen aus eine der Verdrängung verfiel während der Rest, gerade wegen dieser innigen Verknüpftheit, das Schicksal der Idealisierung erfuhr.*(GWSF.10.253)

Does this not ring reminiscent of Aschenbach's attempt to sublimate his desire, first by redirecting his libidinal energy into his writing, then later through Platonic aestheticism? The narrator explains that Aschenbach has had to live for his work, while the reader sees that Aschenbach's superego practices discipline and control over his conscious, especially in moments of ecstasy: "*Auch wurde denn, was ihn da eben so spät und plötzlich angewandelt, sehr bald durch Vernunft und von jung auf geübte Selbstzucht gemäßigt und richtiggestellt*"(448). That which had overcome him is supposedly an impulse to travel, after having seen the mysterious man in the cemetery at the beginning of the story. This figure unleashed repressed feelings in him:

> *Mochte nun aber das Wanderhafte in der Erscheinung des Fremden auf seine Einbildungskraft gewirkt haben oder sonst irgendein physischer oder seelischer Einfluß im Spiele sein: eine seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern ward ihm ganz überraschend bewußt, eine Art schweifender Unruhe, ein jugendlich durstiges Verlangen in die Ferne, ein Gefühl, so lebhaft, so neu oder doch so längst entwöhnt und verlernt, daß er, die Hände auf dem Rücken und den Blick am Boden, gefesselt stehenblieb, um die Empfindung auf Wesen und Ziel zu prüfen.* (446).

What is described here as perhaps an impetus to travel, could likewise be interpreted as a wish to explore his repressed sexuality. How could this stranger in the cemetery inspire him to travel? I am

inclined to believe that he much more awakened repressed sexual feelings in Aschenbach, but I will return to the significance of this first "death figure" at a later point. The fact that whatever feeling Aschenbach is experiencing had to be cured and unlearned already implies something taboo and forbidden. This surely could not arise from and be in reference to a desire to travel, but Aschenbach tries to assure himself that this is, indeed, the source of his intense feelings: "*Es war Reiselust, nichts weiter: aber wahrhaft als Anfall auftretend und ins Leidenschaftliche, ja bis zur Sinnestäuschung gesteigert*"(446-447). How could an inspiration to travel be so passionately felt by a man who despised travel so greatly? I propose this impulse to leave his habitual environment is linked to his sexuality, for is travel not a form of escape from every day life, the rules and regulations by which we must live? The narrator unconvincingly tries to assure the reader:

> *Fluchtdrang war sie, daß er es sich eingestand, diese Sehnsucht ins Ferne und Neue, diese Begierde nach Befreiung, Entbürdung und Vergessen, - der Drang hinweg vom Werke, von der Alltagsstätte eines starren, kalten und leidenschaftlichen Dienstes* (448),

away from a society in which he could not express or simply discover and explore his true desire. This fleeing from his structured, heterosexual life is represented in his desire to travel, to leave his rigid, constructed space. Aschenbach subconsciously wishes to forget his conventional life and pursue sexual freedom. And where would a homosexual at the beginning of the century go for such a pursuit? Italy, of course, which Jones acknowledges as another one of the

primary motifs in German literature thematizing homosexuality[105]. A gay man would naturally go to the decadent, Dionysian country in the South that tolerated homosexuality more readily than the Apollonian North. Outside of literature, many homosexuals went to Italy to carry out a fulfilling life for themselves. Winckelmann, Gloeden, and numerous, prominent, gay aristocrats went to Italy for this reason. The references to Platen, probably the most famous German homosexual to live in Italy, and his inspiring verse on Venice are a direct correlation to Mann's perception of this city, to which Platen fled from Germany "*in Selbstverbannung*" [106].

Yet Aschenbach is anxious about his trip. He wants to leave, but he simultaneously does not want to stray too far from what he knows. He thinks: "*Reisen also, - er war es zufrieden. Nicht gar weit, nicht gerade bis zu den Tigern*"(449). We witness his perilous transition to another space, as he relinquishes his secure, restrained and orderly life in Germany and makes his way to sensuous, licentious Italy. The passages he must make with the boats to get to Venice are representative of the physical, as well as emotional and psychological transitions he will go through in confronting those repressed feelings. As Aschenbach finds himself on the water, a limbo space between two worlds, the reader is provided foreshadowing of the atmosphere of Venice. The ambiance is dark, clouds are looming. When Aschenbach hires a gondolier to take him to the Lido, the reader is faced with more dreary, mysterious

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[105] Jones 282.

[106] Thomas Mann, "*August von Platen*",*Reden und Aufsätze* 1, vol. 9 of *Thomas Mann Gesammelte Werke in Zwölf Bänden.* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1960) 274.

imagery of a transition to the unknown. Aschenbach, who is having communication problems with the disquieting and strange gondolier, ironically makes a remark in relation to Hades(466), as if the gondolier may send him there. For, if Aschenbach did have sexual freedom and licentiousness in mind in his trip, then his Apollonian self would have considered the trip an immoral descent to hell. The description of the ride is eerie and death-like. "*...es erinnert noch mehr an den Tod selbst, an Bahre und düsteres Begängnis und letzte, schweigsame Fahrt.*"(464) Even the gondola itself is a metaphor; it is a "*sargschwarz lackierte" Barke*"(464). Leaving his secure home and secure sexuality, Aschenbach is entering into uncharted, dangerous territory, a new unexplored space. The fact, too, that he leaves solid land to find himself out on the open sea can be seen as a symbol of sexual freedom. All the restraints of his "former" existence are beginning to dissolve into formlessness. The Dionysian spirit is melting him into one with the universal.

Aschenbach's sexual repression becomes apparent when he is admiring Tadzio. He meditates on questions of art, and the reader, again, witnesses Aschenbach's intoxication, the resurfacing of a kind of passion he has had to bridle since his sexual development as a child: "*Sein Geist kreißte, seine Bildung geriet ins Wallen, sein Gedächtnis warf uralte, seiner Jugend überlieferte und bis dahin niemals von eigenem Feuer belebte Gedanken auf*""(490). All those repressed feelings are reemerging and being experienced, even if not freely expressed. In his second day dream which occurs on the beach in Venice, Aschenbach has visions of a mythical Greek sunrise

which end with thoughts of Tadzio. Once more, feelings that had to be repressed are evoked:

> *Ehemalige Gefühle, frühe, köstliche Drangsale des Herzens, die im strengen Dienst seines Lebens erstorben waren und nun so sonderbar gewandelt zurückkehrten, - er erkannte sie mit verwirrtem, verwundertem Lächeln. Er sann, er träumte, langsam bildeten seine Lippen einen Namen...*(495),

and then he falls asleep.

Aside from the codification of homosexual experience through themes like disease, travel and ambivalent repression, there is much concrete symbolism in the text which refers to sexuality, or, as applicable to Aschenbach, homosexuality. The last category comprises sexual allusions through illustrations of oral fixation which occur once Aschenbach has arrived in Venice. As a general rule, Mann has a peculiar fascination about the mouth and teeth, which already becomes apparent in *Buddenbrooks*. Aside from the teeth of the death figures, which have yet to be discussed, the consistency with which Aschenbach notices the teeth of the men he meets, even peripheral characters like the men of the Russian family he sees at the beach, is remarkable. Oddly enough, he never describes the teeth of any of the women: they are always men's teeth, which he usually describes as being large. Naturally, he notices Tadzio's disconcerting dentistry, which conjures images of disease and decay: "*etwas zackig und blaß, ohne den Schmelz der Gesundheit,. ...wie zuweilen bei Bleisüchtigen*"(479). In fact, none of the teeth he describes throughout the story are beautiful and pleasant; it is curious that Aschenbach is so observant of these details.

Furthermore, several of the references to the mouth and teeth bear sexual connotations. For example, one interesting and symbolic event occurs while Aschenbach is a the beach studying Tadzio and his friend Jaschu. "*Sie gingen, als für diesmal die Arbeit am Sandbau beendigt war, umschlungen den Strand entlang, und der, welcher 'Jaschu' gerufen wurde, küßte den Schönen.*(477). Aschenbach immediately thinks of the story of Kritobulos from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* as a warning against the dangers of even simply looking at beautiful *kalɔi* (young men), much less kissing them.[107] It should be clear to the reader that this is not merely a classical allusion, but also a homoerotic remark. Duese writes of the kiss:

> *Daß Aschenbach diesen Kuß sogleich homoerotisch interpretiert, oder sagen wir vorsichtiger: zur Homoerotik des klassischen Griechenland in Beziehung setzt, dürfte auch dem in die Quelle nicht eingeweihten Leser kaum entgehen.*[108]

Immediately following Aschenbach's two-sentence warning of the Kristobulos episode, the reader is informed: "*Und dann frühstückte er große, vollreife Erdbeeren.*"(477) These strawberries have double significance in the text. First, they are the foreshadowing of the agent which will eventually kill him: the overripe strawberries at the end of the story which presumably infect him with the cholera virus. However, the berries signify more than this: fruit in general, and specifically strawberries, emblems of

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[107] Duese 44-45.

[108] Deuse 45.

the love-goddesses[109], bear sexual connotations in relation to the mouth. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that Aschenbach consumes the fruit directly after having achieved a sense of delight in watching the two boys kiss. These strawberries are at once the infectious determinant of his physical ruin, but also "the forbidden fruit" of the turn of the century, which will cause his emotional and psychological demise. The scene preceding Aschenbach's consumption of the fatal fruit is also loaded with erotic significance which, again, links the strawberries to sexuality: "*Sein Kopf brannte, sein Körper war mit klebrigem Schweiß bedeckt, sein Genick zitterte, ein nicht mehr erträglicher Durst peinigte ihn...*"(520). "*Vor einem kleinen Gemüseladen kaufte er einige Früchte, Erdbeeren, überreife und weiche Ware, und aß im Gehen davon.*(520-521). As Eve's biting into the apple symbolizes man's fall from Paradise, so Aschenbach's ingesting the strawberries symbolizes his fall from heterosexual society.

Aside from the strawberries, there are other references to foods harboring sexual implications: mussels, fruit (475), exotic red pomegranate juice(506), which, incidentally, is believed to have sprung from the blood of Dionysus[110]. As Aschenbach is becoming aware of the health hazards in Venice, he reads postings warning of the dangers of eating seafood, oysters, a known aphrodisiac, and, again, mussels(500). These symbols once again link oral fixation to sexuality, as well as sexuality to disease and serves as a warning of

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[109] Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*. (Amsterdam: North-Hillard, 1974) 446.

[110] de Vries 371.

the dangers of indecent eroticism. And, although Aschenbach is fully aware of these various hazards, he willingly allows them to affect him and eventually succumbs to them.

The final example of codification which I would like to illustrate concerns the four male death figures which Aschenbach encounters. Characterized by most critics as beacons of death and decay, I would like to propose an additional function of the figures. The figures embody symbols of male homosexuality, specifically Aschenbach's obsession with their teeth, and they represent Aschenbach's difficulties with his homosexual identity. I have already referred to Freud's theories of repression in this chapter, and now I would like to allude to some Freudian symbolism, on which the following analysis is based. In my analysis, I will critique Freud and modify his theories on the castration complex, as applicable to *Death in Venice*. First, however, I would like to briefly review Mann's familiarity with and perception of Freud.

It is quite well know that Mann was a great admirer of Freud most of his life, even if he did have difficulties with some of his theories and the fashionable psychology of the time. No one can be quite sure of when Mann seriously read Freud, and different critics give different dates. Most agree that Mann probably read Freud by 1925-1926, but was acquainted with his theories indirectly through articles, essays, and the like, long before then.[111] It is believed, though, that Mann was indeed familiar with Freud's theories on psycho-analysis by the time he wrote *Death in Venice,* as well as

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[111] Finck 17.

Freud's "*Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*"(1905)[112], the first traces of which can be found in Aschenbach's tale. Jean Finck writes:

> *Der Dichter gesteht 1925, 'Der Tod in Venedig' sei unter dem unmittelbaren Einfluss von Freud entstanden; ohne Freud hätte er niemals daran gedacht, dieses erotische Motiv zu behandeln, oder hätte es gewiss anders gestaltet.*[113]

Jeffrey Berlin also indicates that Freud not only:

> helped him [Mann] understand himself but also suggested a structure and the thematic means to write about his feelings [about the Tadzio figure Mann encountered in Venice in real life]. These experiences led to the composition of *Death in Venice*.[114]

Finck, as mentioned above, notes that Mann could have applied theories from another psychologist like Krafft-Ebing, for example, but paradoxically used Freud indirectly as a reaction to the '*unanständigen*' psychology of the time.[115] Regardless of how ambiguous Mann's position toward Freud and psychoanalysis may have been, it cannot be denied that he was greatly impressed by him. Mann's lecture on Freud on Freud's 80th birthday attests to this. Unlike most works relating Mann and Freud, though, I shall not concentrate on Freudian psychoanalysis here, but rather on Freudian symbolism in the text to analyze the four aforementioned death

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[112] Finck 46.

[113] Finck 54.

[114] Jeffrey Berlin, "Psychoanalysis, Freud, and Thomas Mann", *Approaches to Teaching Mann's 'Death in Venice' and Other Short Fiction*, ed. Jeffrey Berlin (New York: MLA, 1992) 112.

[115] Finck 57.

figures. However, I must question to what extent Mann was familiar with and possibly influenced by Freudian symbolism. There is nothing indicating that Mann employed Freudian theories of symbolism, such as the dream symbolism discussed in Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* and several of his case studies, but it would not be inconceivable to believe that Mann may have been acquainted with some of these motifs.

Let me begin with the first of the death figures to demonstrate symbolism of homosexuality in *Death in Venice*. As Aschenbach is in Munich at the beginning of the story, he decides to take a pause from his work to take an evening stroll through the Munich streets. He finds a resting spot in the cemetery which he believes is deserted, only to find that he is not alone. In the graveyard with its Greek and Byzantine architecture, Aschenbach notices a stranger, possibly of foreign ancestry. He notices immediately that the figure is a man and makes reference to the man's prominent, "naked", exposed Adam's apple, which is, of course, a male physiognomic characteristic. He describes his carriage as "*etwas herrisch Überschauendes, Kühnes oder selbst Wildes*"(446). He is thin, beardless, has a turned-up nose, red hair and freckles(445). Aschenbach notices that his lips appear to be too thin for his face, causing his teeth to be exposed: "*seine Lippen schienen zu kurz, sie waren völlig von den Zähnen zurückgezogen, dergestalt, daß diese, bis zum Zahnfleisch bloßgelegt, weiß und lang dazwischen hervorbleckten*"(446). The fact that Aschenbach perceives his teeth and lips must have significance, and conjures curiosity, even if only after the reader realizes that this is a recurring observation in all four death figures. Critics who comment

that Aschenbach notices the death figures' teeth claim only that these figures evoke images of death and decay in him. However, these figures simultaneously bear sexual implications, as I intend to demonstrate.

Aschenbach's portrayal of this stranger's teeth is chilling, as if these teeth are capable of doing physical damage; he describes them as long, white and exposed. The figure of the Medusa, signaling primal sexuality and sin[116], springs to mind immediately, for Medusa's teeth are the cultural symbol for the fear of castration. Elaine Showalter notes: "According to Freud, the decapitated head of the Medusa...is a 'genitalized head', an upward displacement of the sexual organs, so that the mouth stands for the *vagina dentata*..."[117] The relevance of this Medusa figure is great, and there are many ways to interpret its connection to the text. First, as a figure of castration, the Medusa represents the death of Aschenbach's male sexuality and, thus, threatens the stringent, bourgeois, patriarchal society within which Aschenbach has tried so desperately to mold an identity; as she castrates him, she castrates the phallus of his heterosexual world. However, her ghastly imagery continues, in that, along with the physical castration, her dreadful teeth embody the fear of the resulting loss of masculinity, of which Aschenbach is so terrified. The mythological *vagina dentata* instills a fear of effeminization in the male and a threat to his physical and emotional manliness.

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[116] de Vries 317.

[117] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. (New York: Viking, 1990) 145.

In addition to the heterosexual context of the Medusa figure, we could also view her as a symbol of detestation of women and a symbol of male homosexuality. In his book *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism,* Richard Dellamora relates the figure of Medusa to male-male desire and notes: "Both contexts, the of 'normal' masculine development plus that of homosexual anxiety are relevant to Medusa in nineteenth-century male literary tradition..."[118] The male homosexual despises and is repelled by the sight of Medusa, for it is she who can turn a man into stone and symbolizes the wicked mysteries and horrors of women. She is the antithesis of everything the homosexual male finds pleasing and natural. Freud, too, makes a similar connection: *"Den durchgängig stark homosexuellen Griechen konnte die Darstellung des durch seine Kastration abschreckenden Weibes nicht fehlen."*(GWSF.17.47-48)

Now, Freud expounds to a great degree on the symbolism of teeth in his work; however, his relation of teeth to castration is found primarily in a female-male formulation. But the figure of Medusa is of ambiguous gender. She is not only female, but also a castrated male figure, as Freud demonstrates, for the young boy seeing female genitalia for the first time, believes she, having once possessed a penis like the boy, has been castrated and has been left with a wound (female genitalia), thus arousing fear of castration in the child (GWSF.17.47). This is the closest Freud comes to equating the Medusa figure with a man. Although it is evident that Freud developed his theory of the castration complex as a part of his

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[118] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism.* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990) 136.

comprehensive understanding of childhood development, I would still ask why Freud would not have considered a theory on the castration complex between two males. I believe it was because of Freud's typical, heterosexual, patriarchal prejudice that he overlooked this possibility. When taken out of the childhood development and female-male context, the idea of the castration complex works between two homosexual males. I would therefore, like to extend this analogy to males and apply it to the death figures in the story.

Assuming that Aschenbach is indeed a repressed homosexual struggling with his sexual identity, I propose that this first death figure, at once intriguing and frightening to Aschenbach, is a symbol of his contention with his homosexual identity. Aschenbach fears the figure as an embodiment of the Medusa because of her, or in this case, his, capacity to castrate him physically; in reference to oral sex between men, he, like the female *vagina dentata*, has the ability to castrate him with his threatening, long, white teeth. But the act of castration, even if performed by a another male, also represents the effeminization of the male, which Aschenbach so fears. Thus, this image of the Medusa figure is a manifestation of Aschenbach's moral and emotional struggle to repress his sexual deviancy.

Now one reference to teeth may not be enough evidence to support my hypothesis at this point, but I shall demonstrate how this relates to each death figure and gains significance. Aschenbach confronts the second death figure on the boat to Venice. He is "*der falsche Jüngling*", decked in a fashionable summer suit with a red tie and Panama hat, make-up, toupee, jewelry, whose lack of manly

stature disgusts Aschenbach. The image of the flamboyant homosexual is a concrete representation of feminization for Aschenbach who, as a reaction to this fear and his own sexual conflict, has overcompensated his manliness. Again, Aschenbach takes special notice of the features of the wrinkled mouth and: "*sein gelbes und vollzähliges Gebiß*"(460). The old fellow is described as being repulsively inebriated and swaying either because of the boat or intoxication, wearing silly expressions and smoking with shaky hands among his young, accommodating male company. This babbling, blinking, giggling, flirtatious man points his index finger teasingly and licks the corner of his mouth in a vulgar way: he "*leckte auf abscheulich zweideutige Art mit der Zungenspitze die Mundwinkel*"(462), the tongue symbolizing a substitute for the phallus [for the death figure represents the castrated male] and sexual challenge[119]. Moreover, Freud, as mentioned above, explains in his *Die Traumdeutung* that there is a symbolic connection between the genitals and the face. He states:

> *Ich mache hier auf die so häufige Verlegung von unten nach oben aufmerksam, die im Dienste der Sexualverdrängung steht und vermöge welcher in der Hysterie allerlei Sensationen und Intentionen, die sich an den Genitalien abspielen sollten, wenigstens an anderen einwandfreien Körperteilen realisiert werden können*(GWSF.2/3.393),

where "*in der Symbolik des unbewußten Denkens die Genitalien durch das Gesicht ersetzt werden*"(GWSF.2/3.393), through features like the mouth. Even Aschenbach acknowledges the sexual

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[119] de Vries 469.

connotation behind the gaudy man's gesture which he homophobically finds repulsive and threatening.

As he leaves the ship, the flamboyant old man bids him a good stay, eyes closed, his mouth watering , again licking the corners of his lips with his tongue. With his fingers provocatively placed at his mouth, he tries to sweet talk Aschenbach by addressing him as "*Liebchen*", "*allerliebsten*", "*schönster Liebchen*" (463), until the upper part of his dentures falls out onto his lower lip. Aschenbach, horrified by the sight, like a man terrorized by the sight of Medusa and the thought of her intimidating teeth, feels threatened and seeks to escape: "*Aschenbach konnte entweichen*"(464). The reference to teeth is once again crucial for two reasons. The first is the general threat of being castrated. But this figure, in addition to metaphorically having the capacity to castrate, is also castrated himself and Aschenbach projects his fear of effeminization on this man who embodies the qualities of the effeminate male. For, in his *Die Traumdeutung*, Freud propounds on the falling out of the teeth as a symbol of castration: "*Zur symbolischen Darstellung der Kastration dient der Traumarbeit:..der Zahnausfall und das Köpfen.*"(GWSF.2/3.362) The old man who was once a masculine male before he was castrated like the Medusa, is a sore reminder to Aschenbach of the pathological homosexual, and symbolizes that which Aschenbach could, and ironically does, become. He embodies the fear of effeminacy and simultaneously is an example of the female soul trapped in a (once) male body, and Aschenbach sees him as a warning of the potential consequences of his own repressed sexuality.

The third death figure is the unpleasant looking gondolier with a brutal physiognomy, who is supposed to take Aschenbach to San Marco. Aschenbach finds him eerie; the man of slight build exposes his white teeth as he strains to row the gondola (465) and does not speak much to Aschenbach - really only to himself. Because of the gondolier's unfriendly reception, Aschenbach becomes suspicious of him and feels as if he has almost (willingly) fallen into the hands of a criminal: "*Die Vorstellung, einem Verbrecher in die Hände gefallen zu sein, streifte träumerisch Aschenbachs Sinne, - unvermögend, seine Gedanken zu tätiger Abwehr aufzurufen.*"(466) We can draw an interesting parallel to homosexuality here. As mentioned above, homosexuals were at the turn of the century considered to be part of a degenerate circle and were often looked upon as criminals. Thus, George Mosse speaks of the fact that "Homosexuals were linked to criminals, both enemies of their society, through their supposed life-style."[120] After all, the fact that homosexuals were punishable by law under Paragraph 175 of the Imperial Criminal Code attests to their criminality. Homosexual were also grouped under the umbrella that included several other marginalized groups that were thought to parallel each other by virtue of their Otherness. When discussing sexuality and criminality, Sander Gilman also relates homosexuality to medicalization and legalities and compares them with Jews in this paradigm: "...'sexual perversions' of the Jews have both a medical and a legal dimension and are understood as parallel to the 'perversions' of the

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[120] Mosse, "Race and Sexuality" 287.

homosexual."[121] Homosexuals were both social criminals, evading and undermining the gender dualism of patriarchy, and simultaneously biological criminals, in that they cheat nature of the natural process of procreation and defy the will of the species. Aschenbach's reference to the figure's teeth, although not discussed in detail, also symbolizes the gondolier as a criminal 'stealing' Aschenbach's masculinity by virtue of castration, as well as undermining the constructs of his dignified, heterosexual lifestyle, as he leads him to Hades. Aschenbach, again, ambivalently fears participating in the ostracized lifestyle of the demasculinized, pathological homosexual.

The final death figure appears as the burlesque street singer at the hotel. The decadent mood is set by a fellow male musician with his sweet, falsetto voice, associated with the effeminate male. But it is the "*Bariton-Buffo*", the main character of the troupe who is center stage. Aschenbach perceives him as a comical, pimp-like, brutal, dangerous and bold, yet entertaining character. He laughs uncontrollably, screams, and really hams up his performance to the delight of the audience. But this self-loving, self-absorbed entertainer simultaneously embodies the typical characteristics of the narcissist, which connects this figure to homosexuality. Freud wrote that narcissism is a characteristic of homosexuality(GWSF.13.205), the source of which he elucidates in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci.

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[121] Gilman 169.

Yet there are other homosexual elements and sexual referents in this last death figure which are evocative of the preceding death figures. While he sings his silly song, Aschenbach notices that the *Buffo* is making ambivalent gestures with his eyes and tongue, which reminds the reader of the flamboyant old man on the boat to Venice: "*...seine Art, andeutend zu blinzeln und die Zunge schlüpfrig im Mundwinkel spielen zu lassen, etwas Zweideutiges, unbestimmt Anstößiges*"(508). Like the vain, pathetic attempt on behalf of the old man to flirt with Aschenbach, the singer sticks out his tongue coquettishly as he slips into the darkness. Like that of the first death figure in the cemetery, the singers Adam's apple is also large and exposed. He, too, bears a wild kind of face. And similar to the corrupt gondolier who would not provide Aschenbach with a direct answer to his question of the fare, the singer likewise deceitfully skirts the issue of the plague when Aschenbach asks him why Venice is being disinfected.

Aschenbach takes note of the *Buffo* as he "*entblößte seine starken Zähne*"(508). This mention of the exposed teeth corresponds to the threat of castration and effeminization, as discussed in the other death figures. However, the singer is symbolically related to homosexuality in another way. He comes around the tables to collect money for his curious but repulsive services, and Aschenbach notices the strange odor that accompanies him: "*Er kam zu Aschenbach und mit ihm der Geruch, über den niemand ringsum sich Gedanken zu machen schien.*"(509). This odor due to the cholera again links homosexuality and disease. Considering all of the similarities this last death figure has with the others, it appears as if

Mann incorporated the various elements of degeneration of the novella in this one figure. He represents the fear of effeminacy, of pathological homosexuality and corruption, and fear of the narcissism which leads to Aschenbach's demise. The way in which Aschenbach perceives the four figures is a manifestation of Aschenbach's struggle with his formulation of homosexual identity and how this applies to him; they serve as an unconscious, psychic warning to Aschenbach of what will happen to him if he does indeed pursue his erotic desire.

I have attempted to demonstrate the codification of homosexuality and Aschenbach's conflict with homosexual desire through various metaphors and textual symbols. The way in which Aschenbach perceives these figures and the details he notices attest to his conflict with the repressed feelings he harbors in his unconscious. Likewise, the reader can see that Mann could codify homosexuality through larger themes like travel and disease which fit into an established discourse on sexuality. By isolating these various elements from the text proper, I hope to have illustrated that homosexuality, apart from the various interconnections it has with other themes in the story, can be a central theme in itself in *Death in Venice*. This becomes evident through recovering, exposing, and emphasizing that which was always considered merely a homosexual subtext.

Chapter 4: Identification and Interdiction: Narrative Stategies in *Death in Venice*

As the other chapters have explored the various techniques Mann used to address yet diffuse homosexuality in *Death in Venice*, this chapter focuses on the narrative strategies Mann employed to be able to write a story with a taboo theme, with content that would presumably offend the typical, educated, bourgeois reader - a story, however, the same audience would find admissible and even entertaining.

Mann's' primary tool is a subtle irony which manifests itself on various levels. The first and most evident use of irony is Mann's successful attempt to write a story of decay and destruction in a "classical" manner. Erich Heller writes:

> The method is perhaps most successful in *Death in Venice*, where a composition of classical order and serenity is used to tell a most unclassical tale of disorder and decomposition, and where the writer, with the irony of a moralist, conjures up by means even of occasional Greek hexameters and German lyricisms, the very religious centres of the worship of beauty: classical antiquity and the Venice of romanticism, of Platen, of Richard Wagner, in order to set against such memories of the story of an artist who falls a victim to the fatal ambiguity of the Beautiful, dying a *Liebestod* before the backcloth of a sea as blue as the Archipelago, but in the vicinity of a plague-ridden city.[122]

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[122] Erich Heller, *The Ironic German: A Study of Thomas Mann* (Boston: Little, Brown , 1958) 23.

It is as if Mann used classical form to compensate for the decadent subject matter of his story. Werner Frizen also acknowledges Mann's ironic dialectic of substance and manner. One mechanism is the *Stilbruch* of depicting and thus raising the banal to almost comically elevated heights through hexameters, as well as archaic vocabulary and mimicry of classical citations[123]. Heller continues:

> It is as if the art of writing tried to gather into itself some of the resources of architecture and music in order to produce transparent clarity of form by means of ceaseless musical allusiveness - a parody of the classical manner achieved with Wagnerian methods.[124]

And what is the result of this juxtapositioning? Heller writes that Mann "fruitfully scandalized the mind by simulating, with the sustained conventional form, the security of tradition, while the very things thus recorded gave the lie to the pretence."[125] Mann ingeniously puts sublime form to the decadent matter and says that which could not be explicitly said, just as Aschenbach attempts to put Apollonian form to his degenerate desire, thereby making the tale acceptable to the general reading public, while still addressing the taboo issue. The irony of this is explicitly pronounced in the text itself when the reader learns of Aschenbach's perception of the fictitious world:

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[123] Werner Frizen, *Thomas Mann: 'Der Tod in Venedig'*, vol. 61 of Oldenbourg Interpretationen, eds. Bernhard Sowinski and Reinhard Meuer (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1993) 117.

[124] Heller 107.

[125] Heller 23.

> *Blickte man hinein in diese erzählte Welt, sah man: die elegante Selbstbeherrschung, die bis zum letzten Augenblick eine innere Unterhöhlung, den biologischen Verfall vor den Augen der Welt verbirgt; die gelbe, sinnlich benachteiligte Häßlichkeit, die es vermag, ihre schwelende Brunst zur reinen Flamme zu entfachen, ja, sich zur Herrschaft im Reiche der Schönheit aufzuschwingen...*(453).

In this way Mann mocks his very audience and their system of belief, but we shall later see how this also serves to deceive his reading public into believing they still maintain authority over the story and the dominant values of their society.

Although this technique is interesting and cunning, I would now like to concentrate on another narrative strategy Mann utilizes to bring an even more manipulative irony into play. This technique involves examining the narrative voices in the story. On the one hand, the reader is invited, indeed almost without choice, to identify with Aschenbach, primarily because of the juxtapositioning of the voice of the main character with that of the narrator. On the other hand, the reader likewise uses the narrator to distance himself from the main character and to judge his incorrigible behavior. The double-perspective of the presentation of the narration is what achieves an ironic effect. Let us first establish how the voices are presented and then investigate the positions these voices occupy within the different narrative levels of the story, as well as their relationship to one another, their role in irony, and then how these narrative techniques affect the audience.

Let us first examine the narrator's prismatic and problematic voice. As far as the issues discussed in this thesis are concerned, he serves two purposes in the story: to establish distance and to create a line of identification with Aschenbach. First, he establishes distance from the story and creates a position of authority for himself by objectively reporting the events of the story. This distance, however, is at times recalled through a break in this distanced narrative voice by the narrator's second function, which is that of identification with the main character. Finally, the initial distance is reestablished by the narrator's commentary on Aschenbach's actions. What makes this voice problematic, however, is that his functions are not placed in any structured, chronological sequence.

As outlined above, the first purpose of the narrator is that of distance. The reader first perceives this distance, because the narrator is essentially omniscient, but more specifically, an extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator. He narrates in this instance from the highest possible level of the text. Nowhere in the story is there any indication that the narrator is indeed a "real" person or a character in the story; he is never even identified. For example. he reports to the reader to introduce the story and the setting: "*Es war Anfang Mai und, nach naßkalten Wochen, ein falscher Hochsommer eingefallen. Der Englische Garten, obgleich nur erst zart belaubt, war dumpfig wie im August und in der Nähe der Stadt voller Wagen und Spaziergänger gewesen.*"(444). As an external focalizer, he is quite removed from the narrative, because he simply reconstructs the events of the story. This impersonal

reporting of events and description of scenarios continues throughout the story, despite the interference of the narrator's other functions. He establishes himself as a panoramic and panachronic observer, always knowing where all the characters are simultaneously, as well as Aschenbach's past, present, and future. Further distance is established through the abstractions the narrator uses to identify Aschenbach, like "*der Alternde*" (494), *der "Einsame"*(492),"*der Reisende"*(461),"*der Schauernde*" (469),"*der Gast*", (487), *"der Verliebte"* (501), "*der Verwirrte*" (503), etc.

His elevated stance gives the impression of grand and ultimate authority over the telling of the story, and causes the reader to be inclined to read the story in light of the narrator's perceptions. For example, the reader learns at the beginning of the story that Aschenbach perceives the eerie figure in the Munich cemetery and that he has been affected by this figure in a strange way. This thought, as almost all of his thoughts, is mediated through the narrator, who "knows" Aschenbach's innermost thoughts and feelings. He concludes for Aschenbach and informs the reader about the feelings this figure aroused in Aschenbach: *"Es war Reiselust, nichts weiter: aber wahrhaft als Anfall auftretend und ins Leidenschaftliche, ja bis zur Sinnestäuschung gesteigert."* (446-447).

However, the reader's impression of the narrator's authority and distance breaks down in certain areas of the text to the point where he cannot fully "rely" on the narrator. Although the narrator encountered in *Death in Venice* is considered to be the most effective, because he does indeed present the single and exclusive reconstruction of the events of the story, he must nonetheless be

viewed critically, for his position is not always entirely distanced. Sometimes we believe that he is right there in the middle of the action, especially when his narration includes phrases like "*Es war sehr warm geworden...*" (477), "*die Luft schien frischer...*"(481), "*es schien, als ob die Seuche eine Neubelebung ihrer Kräfte erfahren...hätte*"(513). It is at these points where the reader begins to question the distance of the narrator.

According to Patrick O'Neill, any narration, which is defined as a "multilevelled intratextual *process,* the (inferred) *cause* of the words upon the page, *reconstructed* (like story) from the text"[126], will always be uncertain and "unreliable to at least some degree"[127]. The reader, moreover, must recall that the narrator is always still another filter or prism through which the reader must perceive and interpret the story, a prism whose refraction the implied author has premeditated and calculated to operate with a varying degree of coloring. That is to say, where the story is the narrative content of the text, the narration presentation manifests itself as a discourse of the text[128], which is never wholly objective and accurate. This is true for *Death in Venice*, because Mann frequently juxtapositions Aschenbach's voice with that of the narrator, an effect which O'Neill calls "ventriloquism", and defines as the narrative discourse's disguising of "the point of origin of its discursive voice"[129]. This is the

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[126] Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory*, unpublished manuscript, publication forthcoming (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994) 25.

[127] O'Neill 70.

[128] O'Neill 3.

[129] O'Neill 58.

primary way in which reader learns about Aschenbach, his history, his thoughts and feelings - through the complex voice of the narrator - since Aschenbach has very little direct discourse in the story. As a matter of fact, his voice is not directly heard until the third chapter, or almost one-third of the way through the story; it is mediated through the narrator. O'Neill continues:

> The most obvious example of the ventriloquism effect in narrative is the representation in a narrative text, by its narrator, of what is said (or thought) by its characters - where the primary voice of the narrator, that is to say, presents another secondary voice of that of a character 'speaking' through it."[130]

One way to achieve this is through compound discourse, where the reader "hears" what a character has said or thought[131] "only at one remove, filtered as it were, through the narrator's 'perception' and presentation of it."[132] This is the most frequently used and most polished narrative technique Mann employs in *Death in Venice*, and likewise, where it seems that the narrator's voice and Aschenbach's voice virtually fuse. The reader recognizes this break in the distanced narrative, because the narrator, although not directly participating in the action, appears at times to have an invested interest in the story which coincides with Aschenbach's intentions, since he creates a specific line of identification with Aschenbach for the reader by drawing him relentlessly into the story. Let us examine one of many passages to demonstrate this. Aschenbach is

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[130] O'Neill 59.

[131] O'Neill 59.

[132] O'Neill 59.

delighted watching Tadzio bathe. The enrapturing description of Tadzio is mediated through the narrator, but then so are Aschenbach's feelings. The two voices are so congruent, they seem to be one here:

> *Er kehrte zurück, er lief, das widerstrebende Wasser mit den Beinen zu Schaum schlagend, hinterübergeworfenen Kopfes durch die Flut; und zu sehen, wie die lebendige Gestalt, vormännlich hold und herb, mit triefenden Locken und schön wie ein zarter Gott, herkommend aus den Tiefen von Himmel und Meer, dem Elemente entstieg und entrann: dieser Anblick gab mythische Vorstellungen ein, er war wie Dichterkunde von anfänglichen Zeit, vom Ursprung der Form und von der Geburt der Götter.* (478)

It is, indeed, often difficult to distinguish between the voices. There are many such passages, in which the narrator is "telling" about Aschenbach's feelings or thoughts through free indirect discourse[133], and the reader cannot be sure if the description or account is objectively that of Aschenbach, or the narrator's colored perception of it; better yet, we should say to what extent these narrated feelings and thoughts are colored. Gérad Genette describes this situation as having a "double ambiguity...: confusion between speech and thought, between character and narrator"[134].

In regard to the descriptions of Tadzio, it is difficult for the reader to decide whose perception of the boy is actually being presented. This ambivalence is particularly evident, when the

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[133] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Trans. Christine van Boheemen, (1985; Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) 140-141.

[134] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 52.

narrator identifies Tadzio authoritatively as "*der schöne Knabe*", who is "*schöner als sich sagen läßt*" (498), as if the boy were in fact a beautiful creature in everyone's eyes, not just Aschenbach's, thus creating a threefold identification between Aschenbach, narrator and reader:

> *Wie er nun aber so tief ins Leere träumte, ward plötzlich die Horizontale des Ufersaumes von einer menschlichen Gestalt überschnitten, und als er seinen Blick aus dem Unbegrenzten einholte und sammelte, da war es der schöne Knabe, der, von links kommend, vor ihm im Sande vorüberging*"(475).

Again, their voices appear to melt into one perspective. There are no supplementary subjective narratives from additionally embedded narrators or characters in the story, only the voices of the shifting narrator and Aschenbach. This in turn reinforces the line of identification with Aschenbach established for the reader, who is supplied with limited perspective. Mann continues to channel this perspective by offering the reader insight into Aschenbach's tale by appealing to the reader, blurring his boundaries between reality and fantasy: "*Aber im leeren, im ungegliederten Raume fehlt unserem Sinn auch das Maß der Zeit, und wir dämmern im Ungemessenen*" (461), transporting the reader to a fictional time and space where he will experience what Aschenbach experiences, feel what Aschenbach feels. Freud was very interested by the ability of an author to create such an identification, "*wie er es zustande bringt, uns mit ihnen so zu ergreifen, Erregungen in uns hervorzurufen, deren wir uns vielleicht nicht einmal für fähig gehalten hätten.*"(GWSF.7.214) Just as it seems that the narrator fuses with Aschenbach, the reader, too, becomes fully absorbed in Aschenbach's world and even begins

to identify and sympathize with the homosexual character, which would seem far removed from the typical heterosexual audience's experience. Mann accomplishes this, according to Freud, because he facilitates the *"Befreiung von Spannungen in unserer Seele"* (GWSF.7.223), tensions which might otherwise be inadmissible to readers outside of the fictional world.

Consider this passage, in which the reader learns from the empathetic narrator of what happens when Tadzio and Aschenbach make eye contact:

> *Zuweilen aber auch blickte er auf, und ihre Blicke trafen sich. Sie waren beide tief ernst, wenn es geschah. In der gebildeten und würdevollen Miene des Älteren verriet nichts eine innere Bewegung; aber in Tadzio's Augen war ein Forschen, ein nachdenkliches Fragen, in seinen Gang kam ein Zögern, er blickte zu Boden, er blickte lieblich wieder auf, und wenn er vorüber war, so schien ein Etwas in seiner Haltung auszudrücken, daß nur Erziehung ihn hinderte, sich umzuwenden.* (497)

Tadzio is looking not only at Aschenbach, he is also glancing at the reader through Aschenbach. This is evocative of the scene, in which Aschenbach is preparing to leave Venice. Tadzio passes by his table one last time: *"Adieu, Tadzio! dachte Ascehnbach. Ich sah dich kurz."* (482) Like the narrator, the reader, drawn into Aschenbach's world, also feels Aschenbach's anxiety and heart break; he, too, has all too briefly seen Tadzio and must now bid him a sorrowful farewell. This powerful narrative strategy aligns Aschenbach, the narrator, and the reader to render the ironic three-fold identification.

However, this is not true for all narrations in the text. I have thus far demonstrated how the narrator creates distance by simply

reconstructing the story. I have likewise demonstrated how the juxtapositioning of the voice of the narrator and Aschenbach can reinforce the line of identification for the reader. Yet, there is one effect of free indirect discourse to which I would still like to allude. The narrator in *Death in Venice* also displays instances of interpretation, judgments, and generalizations[135], which sway the reader's perception of the story and subsequently his attitude toward Aschenbach. First, the aforementioned abstractions used to identify Aschenbach are subjectively selected adjectives and participles the narrator uses to express his perception of Aschenbach: *der "Einsame"*(492), *"der Enthusiasmierte"*(491), *"der Heimgesuchte"*(492), *"der Verliebte"* (501), *"der Verwirrte"* (503), *"der Betörte"*(504), etc. The narrator uses these words in place of Aschenbach's name to reflect the transformation of Aschenbach's inner state[136] and the gradual entropy of Aschenbach's identity.

But let us consider a passage that illustrates the narrator's negative assessment of Aschenbach more explicitly. The main character is once again observing Tadzio and:

> *...in aufschwärmendem Entzücken glaubte er mit diesem Blick das Schöne selbst zu begreifen, die Form als Gottesgedanken, die eine und reine Vollkommenheit, die im Geiste lebt und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war. Das war der Rausch; und unbedenklich, ja gierig*

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[135] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* (London: Methuen, 1983) 98-99.

[136] See also Ulrich Dittmann, *Sprachbewußtsein und Redeformen im Werk Thomas Manns: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis des Schriftstellers zur Sprachkrise* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1969) 90.

> *hieß der alternde Künstler ihn willkommen. Sein Geist kreißte, seine Bildung geriet 'allen...*(490).

Clearly, the narrator is imposing value judgments on Aschenbach. In this case, the reader is influenced by the poignant words used in the evaluation of Aschenbach by the narrator, who exposes the Dionysian intoxication which is overcoming Aschenbach's Apollonian virtuousness.

We can draw another interesting parallel here to further define the respective voices. It is evident that Aschenbach is consumed with passion. In a sense we can say that he is driven by his sexual libido according to the "pleasure principle", by his "id", as Freud would have it, and, perhaps, as Mann himself would have wished to have had it.

The reader witnesses how Aschenbach allows himself to be dictated by his passion. Referring again to Aschenbach's following the Polish family, the reader learns:

> *So wußte und wollte denn der Verwirrte nichts anderes mehr, als den Gegenstand, der ihn entzündete, ohne Unterlaß zu verfolgen, von ihm zu träumen, wenn er abwesend war, und nach der Weise der Liebenden seinem bloßen Schattenbild zärtliche Worte zu geben.*(503).

The reader is made to identify with Aschenbach's desire, since Aschenbach is the primary focalized object of the text. He vicariously experiences Aschenbach's pursuit, because he is pulled along by the narrator, in the deviant pursuit, the ups and downs, the pain and pleasure of Aschenbach's adventure. "*Der Verliebte*" acts

with abandon and does not play by the established rules of his society, although not without a sense of guilt:

> *Er dachte ihrer auch jetzt und hier, verstrickt in ein so unstatthaftes Erlebnis, begriffen in so exotischen Ausschweifungen des Gefühls, gedachte der haltungsvollen Strenge, der anständigen Männlichkeit ihres Wesens und lächelte schwermütig. Was würden [seine Vorfahren] sagen? Aber freilich, was hätten sie zu seinem ganzen Leben gesagt, das von dem ihren so bis zur Entartung abgewichen war...* (503-504).

As the lustful Aschenbach is representative of the "id", the narrator condemns his behavior and instills this sense of guilt in Aschenbach, functioning as a representative and mediator of Aschenbach's, as well as the reader's and possibly Mann's, "super-ego" by making moral judgments about his character and behavior. To illustrate another example, the narrator comments on the consequences of Aschenbach's orgiastic dream. The events:

> *...brachen von außen herein, seinen Widerstand - einen tiefen und geistigen Widerstand- gewalttätig niederwerfend, gingen hindurch und ließen seine Existenz, ließen die Kultur seines Lebens verheert, vernichtet zurück*(515-516).

If Aschenbach's voice, as mediated through the sympathetic narrator, is representative of the 'pleasure principle', then it would follow that the distanced narrator's voice speaks from the 'reality principle'. For example, the narrator describes Aschenbach, who is stalking the Polish family, as being "*am Narrenseile geleitet von der Passion*" (520). The narrator's commentary on Aschenbach's pursuit, describing Aschenbach as having lost reason, is irrefutably negative,:

> [Ascehnbach] *verlor sie, suchte erhitzt und erschöpft nach ihnen über Brücken und in schmutzigen Sackgassen und erduldete Minuten tödlicher Pein, wenn er sie plötzlich in enger Passage, wo kein Ausweichen möglich war, sich entgegenkommen sah. Dennoch kann man nicht sagen, daß er litt. Haupt und Herz waren ihm trunken, und seine Schritte folgten den Weisungen des Dämons, dem es Lust ist, des Menschen Vernunft und Würde unter seine Füße zu treten.* (501-502)

This is not merely an objective account of the event, but rather a subjective commentary on Aschenbach's behavior. Yet there is a narrative ambivalence present in this passage that is most intriguing. Even though the narrator reestablishes distance by judging Aschenbach, he simultaneously seems to sympathize with him. It is precisely these passages which condemn Aschenbach, that also draw the reader most intimately into the story. Consider the passage, with which this thesis began. Aschenbach, overcome with passion, throws himself on a bench exhausted, excited, aroused, frightened, yet delighted:

> *Und zurückgelehnt, mit hängenden Armen, überwältigt und mehrfach von Schauern überlaufen, flüsterte er die stehende Formel der Sehnsucht, - unmöglich hier, absurd, verworfen, lächerlich und heilig doch, ehrwürdig auch hier noch: "Ich Liebe dich!"* (498)

The reader feels himself to be right there with Aschenbach, indeed in Aschenbach, articulating "*die stehende Formel der Sehnsucht*" with him, feeling Aschenbach's sense of being overcome and feeling the pounding of his own heart. Yet in this moment of deepest identification, in this moment of "*ehrwürdig*" love, the ambivalent narrator simultaneously expresses the sternest judgment, calling

this love absurd, impossible, ridiculous, and degenerate - all in the same sentence, as if the closest sense of identification requires a most emphatic interdiction to strike the necessary balance.

The juxtapositioning of the voices through the narrator yields the double-perspective present in the narration and opens the opportunity for Mann's artful irony to make itself visible. The first perspective, as discussed above, is that of the distanced narrator. Baumgart writes in regard to uses of irony: "*Doch vor allem, wenn der Erzähler als besonderes Wesen, als Figur und Person, aus der Geschichte heraustritt, stellt sich ein Abstand her, dessen Sprielraum* (sic) *vermittelnde und nach beide Seiten hin relativierende Ironie ausfüllen kann.*"[137] From here the distanced narrator exercises control over the narration; he can ironically color the scenarios with his comments and judgments, while simultaneously criticizing the general reading audience, if he so pleases. But this is only the one side of the narrative coin. The identification created for the reader by the sympathetic position of the narrator represents a break in the narrative voice of the otherwise distanced position of the narrator through the free indirect discourse. "*Gerade die indirekte Wiedergabe steigert auch die Ironie...*"[138], an irony which manifests itself on various levels, whether it be in play with the main character, the reader, or the narrator himself. It now becomes evident how the narrator of *Death in Venice* astutely controls the

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[137] Reinhard Baumgart, *Das Ironische und die Ironie in den Werken Thomas Manns,* Literatur als Kunst Ser., eds. Kurt May and Walter Höllerer (München: Carl Hanser, 1964) 56.

[138] Baumgart, *Ironie* 61.

discourse of the narrative. Baumgart summarizes his position: "[*Der Erzähler*] *wahrt das Gesetz der doppelten Perspektive, in der sich hier harmonisches Einstimmen und dissonantes Abstandnehmen wechselseitig und ironisch durchdringen.*"[139] This sets the stage for the reader's perception and evaluation of Aschenbach to sway with the narrator between identification and interdiction. If it were not for this ambivalent, double-sided presentation of Aschenbach's chronicle, the reader would not be able to digest the subject matter of the tale as easily as he does. The narrator manipulates the reader, so that he can come close enough to the situation to feel as though he is living it, but can distance himself to secure himself in a safe realm outside of the story again. The fact that Mann was able to use these techniques to manipulate a predominantly heterosexual, bourgeois audience into identifying with a homosexual *Außenseiter* makes the story all the more a masterpiece.

Mann's irony is a very refined and bourgeois irony whose final aim is not ultimately to subvert. In *Death in Venice* the narrator subtly and arrogantly exposes the social structures of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, thereby ridiculing the very reading audience he has targeted, an audience whose nature he understands (and can therefore manipulate) with "penetrating realistic insight"[140], as Lukács remarked. This irony can further be conceived of as self-irony, since Thomas Mann clearly considers himself to be a member of the same bourgeois society he criticizes. This is generally true for

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[139] Baumgart, *Ironie* 64.

[140] Georg Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann*, Trans. Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1964) 132.

his works, whose protagonists are often literary artists at odds with their society's social mandates, but even more poignant here, considering Aschenbach's crisis concerning his sexual identity within a heterosexist society. The main character comes in many ways close to his creator, in that both struggle to establish an identity (artistically, sexually, etc.) in a society whose rigid social structures are the "*Trotzdem*" of their work, and a contraposition to the more humane values of Aschenbach and Mann, "*die am Rande der Erschöpfung arbeiten*" (453). Recalling his ambivalent self-perception, Mann straddles the line between the sphere of the artist and Eros, and the sphere of the educated *Bürger*, and acknowledges the problems of the incongruence of this polarity in *Death in Venice* through Aschenbach. These ironic elements of autobiography add a touch of humor that softens the impact of the social criticism of the story and renders it less threatening, but no less significant, precisely because Mann does not exclude himself from his critique.

Furthermore, Mann ironizes art itself by referring to its ambiguous nature. Art is madness, chaos, and excess in itself. It must be this way, and the reader must live through Aschenbach's chaos if he is to take part in the art process. The irony of this is articulated through Aschenbach, who, although he believes the piece of prose produced in Tadzio's presence to be worthy and of integrity, also confesses that his inspiration for the piece would be shocking and distracting to some. He thinks to himself:

> *Es ist sicher gut, daß die Welt nur das schöne Werk, nicht auch seine Ursprünge, nicht seine Entstehungsbedingungen kennt; denn die Kenntnis der Quellen, aus denen dem Künstler Eingebung floß, würde*

> *sie oftmals verwirren, abschrecken und so die Wirkungen des Vortrefflichen aufheben.* (493).

Mann exposes the double-irony of art which needs disorder to produce the beautiful masterpiece. Without condemning this process entirely, Mann manipulates his audience into accepting the piercing truth behind the artist and his creation, as well as Aschenbach's tale.

However, that which inexorably makes the story acceptable is the final act, which is one of reconciliation with his bourgeois reading audience. In the end, despite all the subtle criticism, the story concludes in affirming the status quo, by reaffirming the prohibition of the taboo subject matter. We can call this irony a very bourgeois irony, because, although the values of this social class are in part subverted through the very act of reading and embracing such a taboo story, they are eventually reaffirmed through Aschenbach's demise. In this sense, the story has come full circle from where it commenced. In my interpretation, the story begins with the interdiction (repression) of the taboo subject of homosexuality by middle class society and Aschenbach himself. Although diffused and redirected, the theme is addressed in such a way that ironically causes incitement and heightened perception of the homoeroticism and even identification with the main character on the part of the audience; on the one hand we detect the undermining effect of this incitement, but, on the other hand, we must recognize that the story ends with a seeming reconfirmation of the original prohibition of the taboo, since death as a "narrative principle" reestablishes order. It is because of this cycle that the typical, heterosexual, bourgeois reader can participate in the otherwise forbidden discourse presented in the

story. The reader can rest assured that "decency" and "moral justice" do indeed prevail. The predominant values of the reader's society are apparently reinforced, confirming for him that the values of his ethical, heterosexual, Apollonian sphere are in favor of life, "*während aller Ästhetizismus pessimistisch-orgiastischer Natur,* [*ein kategorischer Imperativ*] *des Todes ist.*"[141]

[141] Mann, "*Über die Ehe*" 199.

Conclusion: Aschenbach on the Beach

The intention of this thesis was to examine how homosexuality is represented in *Death in Venice* , and to demonstrate how Mann was able to incorporate such a taboo issue in a story that Wilhelmine Germany would come to embrace. I first attempted to show the historical context in which the novella was written to shed light on how the novella has been received in the past, as well as Thomas Mann's conflicting position toward the subject, in order to better understand why we need to reconsider traditional interpretations of the text which do not treat homosexuality as a central theme in itself. Likewise, I wanted to demonstrate how the interdiction of a subject like homosexuality can ironically result in visibility and incitement.

In conclusion, I would like to propose a visual representation of the remaining issues discussed in this thesis. In considering the various paradigms in which I have attempted to formulate my theories, we can imagine the homosexual theme of the story as white light being refracted through a prism into the various components of visible light of the rainbow. Through the employment of Greek tradition, Mann was able to diffuse the homosexual desire inherent in the story, like light through a prism, without minimizing its value and effect. I formulated a philosophical debate around Aschenbach's attempt to salvage his dignity in light of his "demoralizing" sexuality which fits into the framework of his overall value system. Although it seems as if homosexual desire is hiding behind aestheticism in the

text, it is actually only being addressed in a different forum. The essence is there; it is not diminished but rather has taken on a different form. As far as the sublimation of homosexual desire in the imagery of *Death in Venice* is concerned, it has heretofore remained an unexplored question which desperately needed to be addressed, in order to show that, although codified, homosexuality manifests itself as a prevalent theme on several levels throughout this text. This sublimation, like another wavelength in the spectrum, does not minimize the significance of the subject of homosexuality; the concepts merely reveal themselves on another *niveau*. Finally, Mann uses irony on various levels to manipulate his audience so that he could indeed write a story about forbidden love. The complexity and duality of the narration serves to strategically refract while simultaneously affirm the homosexual theme of the story. Via the shifting narrator, the heterosexual reader achieves a sense of the "cheap thrill" of transgression by living vicariously through Aschenbach's decadent and demoralizing experiences, yet can resort to the narrator's judgmental discourse to restore reality. In this sense, the narrator serves to mediate and diffuse the homoeroticism of the story by making it accessible to the reader, while simultaneously softening its shock value.

This technique functions ironically like a double-edged sword, like the final image of Aschenbach, dead in his beach chaise facing the vast, open sea to which Tadzio is gesturing. His "narratological" death may be the ultimate penalty for transgressing the boundaries of bourgeois, Wilhelmine society; Aschenbach may have succumbed to the absolute taboo, but he nonetheless dies a beautiful death, a

Liebestod, rather than an ugly, bitter, pathological death. He may have lost the Apollonian but, upon following Tadzio's final gesture, he still achieves the ultimate wish-fulfillment in his Dionysian union with the beloved object:

> *Vom Festlande geschieden durch breite Wasser, geschieden von den Genossen durch stolze Laune, wandelte er, eine höchst abgesonderte und verbindungslose Erscheinung, mit flatterndem Haar dort draußen im Meere, im Winde, vorm Nebelhaft-Grenzenlosen...und plötzlich, wie unter einer Erinnerung, einem Impuls, wandte er den Oberkörper, eine Hand in der Hüfte, in schöner Drehung aus seiner Grundpositur und blickte über die Schulter zum Ufer. Der Schauende dort saß.... Sein Haupt war an der Lehne des Stuhles langsam der Bewegung des draußen Schreitenden gefolgt; nun hob es sich, gleichsam dem Blick entgegen, und sank auf die Brust...*(524) *Ihm war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche Psychogog dort draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke; als ob er, die Hand aus der Hüfte lösend, hinausdeute, voranschwebe ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheuere. Und, wie so oft, machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen.*(525)

It is here that Mann's manipulation of his audience through his mastery over language makes itself apparent. The reader sympathetically witnesses Aschenbach's tragic dissolution; indeed, he becomes so engrossed in the story by identifying with the homosexual Aschenbach, that it appears as though the typically heterosexual reader, too, has transgressed these forbidden boundaries with Aschenbach. On the one hand, the reader is brought back to his secure sphere of decent bourgeois sexuality and values by the narrator, the status quo is reaffirmed, and he closes the cover of *Death in Venice*, content in knowing that both he and

Aschenbach have found completion and return to the realm in which they "belong". On the other hand, though, in the very ambiguity of this death image, the reader's desire for restored order and Aschenbach's tabooed longing have both been paradoxically fulfilled.

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