

Thomas Mann, “Expressionism,” and *Death in Venice*

**Introduction to Session on Death in Venice: Warrington
Colecott and Thomas Mann, exhibited at Madison
Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA)
Madison, Wisconsin
October 22, 2015**

OPENING

[1 TITLE PAGE]

Thanks to

**Sheri Castelnuova (Curator of Education),
Stephen Fleischman (Director),
the staff of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art,
my dad,
and of course Warrington himself—who unfortunately couldn’t
be here today.**

BACKGROUND ON EXPRESSIONISM

**Begin at Realist/Impressionist stage—German incorporates then
responds**

**After the emergence of politically motivated Social Realist art in
France as well as German lands, [2 REALIST COLLAGE] and ...
then the refinement of efforts to capture “reality,” as
immediately and scientifically accurately as possible via the
Impressionist revolution in representative techniques [3
IMPRESSIONIST COLLAGE], Germany and Austria were the sites
of increasingly important moves toward modernist aesthetics.**

**Most famously, it is in Germany and Austria that Expressionism
and, ultimately, Abstract Expressionism, developed as an
intensification of the “inward” turn that took place at the end of
the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century.**

Shift toward Symbolism

**Although rooted in what can be understood as “Romantic”
concepts that German cultural figures had contrived in response
to the earliest phases of the modern age, according to the
standard survey of these developments, this move toward a**

“deeper” representation of reality that included the subjective as well as the objective dimensions can be seen as having commenced in France as triggered by the “Symbolist” critic and poet, Charles Baudelaire. [4 BAUDELAIRE IMAGE]

Influenced by him, writers, composers, and painters began to blend increasingly complex combinations of imagery to symbolize not just what was occurring in their fast modernizing lives, but also what the “felt” about those experiences. [5 SYMBOLIST COLLAGE]

Move to Post-Impressionism [6 POST-IMPRESSIONIST COLLAGE]

Evolving along these lines Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Toulouse-Lautrec, under the broad rubric of “Post-Impressionism”—or better, “Impressionism Plus”—ruptured color schemes, systems of perspective, and notions of “photographic” accuracy to convey their inner feelings about external experience.

Similar developments east of France

Though perhaps a step later--since Impressionism took slightly longer to take hold in places like Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Oslo--similar trends were taking place in regions east of Arles and Paris.

German “Symbolists” . [7 GERMAN SYMBOLIST COLLAGE]

Like the first French Symbolists Boecklin, Klinger, and Stuck moved to representation of inner states with reference to traditional culture. [8 NIETZSCHE FREUD IMAGE]

Shift to Expressionism [9 EXPRESSIONIST COLLAGE A]

Secessionists such as Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele in Vienna emerged parallel to the increasing importance of Nietzsche and Freud, who was working precisely in their world.

Contemporary trends in Munich, Berlin, even Oslo constituted parts of an “Expressionist” movement as a whole [[10 EXPRESSIONIST COLLAGE B]

Muenter, Marc, Kandinsky, Kirchner, Nolde, and of course Edvard Munch [he painted multiple versions of *The Scream* between 1898 and 1910] all developed explicit combinations of “primitive” technique and psychological symbolism in order to use their arts as part of a deep inquiry into the modern soul.

Shift to Abstract Expressionism [11 ABSTRACT COLLAGE]

Ultimately, these trends lead to the break through most importantly manifested in the works of Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian who was living in Munich when he transitioned into

non-representational REPRESENTATION of the inner life--in the most immediate sense.

[First “abstract” work in 1910. Released “On the Spiritual in Art” in 1910.

Expressionism in music

Parallel to these developments in the visual arts, we should also recognize that there was a progression through what we can call Expressionism in Music as well.

Debussy [12] actually considered himself a “Symbolist,” rejecting label of Impressionist composer as an insult to the spiritualistic, psychological nature of his compositions.

Claire de lune (1890)

***La Mer* (1903)**

***Preludes* (1910)**

Ravel [*Shéhérazade* (1898), Satie [*Gymnopédies* [3] (1888)], Saint-Saens [*The Carnival of the Animals* (1887)] all intensified the introspective implications of musical expression.

Whatever you may think now, Richard Wagner [13] was widely considered as a Modernist (as well as a Romantic, Revolutionary, Nationalist and Anti-Semitic) creator

***Leitmotiven* systematically traced fleeting concepts and feelings.**

Sensuality - *Tristan und Isolde* [1865]; *Parsifal* [1882]

Richard Strauss [14]

Loved Nietzsche and conveyed this in his “tone poem” - *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896)

Put deep psychology and sensuality explicitly on the stage-*Salome* (1905)

Arnold Schoenberg [15] - *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) in his earlier “expressionist” stage

Gustav Mahler [16]

Psychology (Freud)

Symphony 1 (1896)

***Symphony 5* [Used in Visconti film] (1902)**

***Kindertotenlieder* (1901-1904)**

Ultimately, in close awareness of what Kandinsky was doing simultaneously in art, Schoenberg [17] breaks through to “pan-

tonal” or what comes to be known as atonal compositions.

Five Orchestral Pieces (1908)

Pierrot Lunaire (1912)

BACKGROUND ON THOMAS MANN

Born in 1875 [18]

Came of age while all of the the above developments were taking place.

We must situate his early works, especially *Death in Venice* within this amazing framework of Turn of the Century culture in Europe in general, and Germany/Austria in particular.

His *literary* work must be correlated—though not equated--with the great works above.

Mann is not officially considered a member of the Expressionist movement. He is not part of the

One thing that differs is his highly refined style. The exquisite structure of his stories and longer narratives. He is not represented of the more “stream of consciousness” style that was emerging. His works are incredibly disciplined and ordered, though there are moments when he cuts loose and symbolizes the most intense emotional states.

This is the tension that exists in almost all of his stories: between his emotional, Dionysian, artistic nature, exploring passions, instincts, drives that Freud and Nietzsche were saying we are driven by, and the disciplined, scientific, Apollonian nature necessary to capture, study, and present it. He is always discussing and representing the two sides of the Western nature (with all their complex permutations) in this sense.

Mann’s “homosexuality,” bisexuality, or homo-erotic nature was eating at him at all times. He was not “out.” This is the real tension within him. But he draws from that symbols of anyone dealing with drives that are “not to be named” and the effort to manage and channel them in some constructive rather than self-destructive way.

This makes him distinct from the Expressionist movement as a whole: he doesn’t “jump into” it, but looks at it, studies it, trying to keep things in check with a wife and family of 6 children. It is that effort that comes through.

Therefore, his works may be more immediately representative of the trends as they manifested direct applications of ideas formulated by writers such as Nietzsche and Freud at the time.

Youth in Lubeck [19]

Son of a trading family in “northern” world of discipline and commerce. Lubeck a port city in the Hanseatic League. Very “bourgeois,” protestant culture. [20]

“Double” nature: Father a scion of the multi-generational “bourgeois” success of the family. [21]

But he did something “strange,” for that world, in marrying a woman of German and Portuguese ancestry who emigrated to Germany from Brazil when she was seven years old. [22] He brought this vivacious, artistic spirit into this world.

For Mann this is symbolic of his dual nature—understood in literally biological terms (increasingly common at the time).

Moreover, the father made a unique move that marked a decadent end to this proper, upright mentality of the north German business man. When he came to retirement and writing his will, he decided to dissolve the trading firm. He did not consider his sons capable of continuing it. It was over.

So, when he died in 1891, the mother moves the family to “southern” Munich.

Mann saw this as an “endpoint” that the “Liberal” age of the period had come to an end and was entering a decadent stage—embodied in his own being!

Heinrich and Thomas Mann brothers [23]

The brothers study and become writers instead of business men.

Heinrich, the elder, begins writing - Socialist, Realist, novelist in the tradition of Zola. [24]

Thomas more conservative - immersed in “Romantic” culture. [25]

He said that the “stars in his constellation” were not Zola, Marx, and the French Socialists, but Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche - and increasingly, I would add, Freud. That’s a very potent combination!

Bi-sexuality [26]

Mann was repressed for his whole life.

Married Katia Pringsheim (wealthy Jewish heiress). Six children. [27]

Writes *Buddenbrooks* (1901) at age of 24-26. [28]

Here he wrote the history of his family and all these elements,

including the “decline” of the father, the marriage to the Latinate outsider, and the end of this business house.

Magnificent novel—maybe his best.

Used Schopenhauer and Wagner references to symbolize notion that father was trending away from the needs of the business and slipping toward this new age of asceticism and decadence.

But short stories and short novels are equally important:

"Little Herr Friedemann" (1897)

"The Joker" (1897)

"Tristan" (1903)

"Tonio Kroeger" (1903)

They include references to his own life, his family's life, Freud, Nietzsche, Wagner—but not just those. He weaves together tapestries of references to the whole of the Western tradition of which he had total command in order to create symbols of this sense of personal turmoil.

This is a sign of the technical, stylistic influence that Wagner has on him. He develops “Leading Motives” like Wagner does: references to the parents, boyhood memories, feelings toward his own children, passing thought—these keep cropping up in all the stories, in different guises—sometimes altering their apparent significance, just as Wagner does with the “Leitmotiven” of his music dramas.

Overall, each of these characters are symbols of his own self doubt. They are all about the inner turmoil as people come to consciousness of their divide natures. In them he seems to articulate, in subtle ways, his concern about whether he will be able to face the truth of his nature—to be honest and open about it; then, having done so, to channel it in some constructive way.

This is what Nietzsche had called for: know your nature, become your self, and go your own way in a creative sense. On the other hand, Freud recognizes similar “psychological” issues, but then tried to guide people to manage them in a way that would return them to “normalcy.” In this sense, every character is split. Every time you think you are sure what a scene, image, or even character's development means, it seems to slip away from you. Reading him is similar to trying to control quicksilver or mercury. As soon as you think you have grasped it, another reading renders it more complicated, and the search continues. Though written in a structured way, these stories leave things “open,” given this Nietzschean, Expressionist awareness that we are a

complicated congerly of things and no simple explanation will suffice.

I don't want to take away the ending, but the stories generally do not end well. Mann is signifying doubt about whether most people are going to be able to do what Nietzsche calls for. They may come to question the Liberal, materialistic, superficial side of things, and delve into their true nature. But when they see that, they may not have the strength to "overcome" and move to the new phase of creative wholeness (the Superman, or next man).

Mann does. Because he is able to write it. But he peoples his stories with many others who aren't able to do that.

This seems to indicate a general lack of confidence. They may expose themselves, but it could be dangerous for them, or for society as a whole—if they end up seeking ways to cover this over.

Thus, Mann's stories all constitute a deep inquiry into the psychological state of German upper middle class at turn of the century. [29]

But, they also stand as masterpieces of the Western inquiry into the soul that are universally valid, and perhaps the greatest among them is *Death in Venice*.

INTRODUCTION TO DEATH IN VENICE

Published in *Die neue Rundschau* in 1912. [30]

Mann was only 37 years old.

But, amazingly, he set forth to capture the profound stages of a "mid-life crisis" experienced by man at least twenty years older.

The extent to which he was able to imagine and capture this in a way that is considered universally valid give you a sense of the power of such a thinker, and indeed all of those we are considering in this framework.

BACKGROUND TO COLESCOTT'S WORKS

I will go through story and give you a close reading of some of the most famous quotations from the text.

My goal is not to explain Warrington's representations of them, but to give you sense of the original source of these ideas and images.

For Thomas Mann's was indeed a world of letters and I believe you need to immerse yourself in the text in which he wrought the exquisite concepts that touched Warrington so deeply before

we can really consider how he synthesized them with his own life and work.

SPECIFIC PASSAGES OF DEATH IN VENICE CORRELATED WITH WARRINGTON'S IMAGES

The story is initially set in Munich, and if you are familiar with it you will recognize the sites he depicts—drawing from the “realist” side of the tradition he is building on.

The story is about his life: the life of a great writer, whom he gives the name Gustav Aschenbach. In doing so, Mann was taking material from the “actual” world—just as Baudelaire and Van Gogh, Lautrec, and the others of this era were doing—and then aestheticizing it to represent much more.

After his usual, puritanical, start of the day, “The morning’s writing had overstimulated him” and he needs a break, so he goes for a walk in the Englischer Garten of Munich.

[31]

apartment on the Prinzregentenstrasse in Munich to take a walk of some length by himself. The morning’s writing had overstimulated him; his work had now reached a difficult and dangerous point which demanded the utmost care and circumspection, the most insistent and precise effort of will, and the productive mechanism in his mind—that *motus animi continuus* which according to Cicero is the essence of eloquence—had so pursued its reverberating rhythm that he had been unable to halt it even after lunch, and had missed the refreshing daily siesta which was now so necessary to him as he became increasingly subject to fatigue. And so, soon after taking tea, he had left the house hoping that fresh air and movement would set him to rights and enable him to spend a profitable evening.

As he moves through this world his inner feelings are narrated.

The sight of a strange man in the cemetery, dressed in volkisch outfit, triggers an emotional shift in Aschenbach—an involuntary thought or feeling just pops up without clear explanation. {196}

“Whether some other physical or psychological influence was at work...” [32]

even stirred by the stranger’s barbarian appearance, or whether some other physical or psychological influence was at work, he now became conscious, to his complete surprise, of an extraordinary expansion of his inner self, a kind of roving restlessness, a youthful craving for far-off places, a feeling so new or at least so long unaccustomed and forgotten that he stood as if rooted, with his hands clasped behind his back and his eyes to the ground, trying to ascertain the nature and purport of his emotion. *for he*

So, here he's explicitly talking about subconscious influences... something unconscious became conscious...trying to figure out what might have caused it.

But also, at the turn of the twentieth century, the extension of the early *nineteenth* century concept of "restlessness" or "*Sehnsucht*"—yearning for something else, somewhere else, green grass elsewhere. So Mann is still writing in that Romantic idiom, but updated for the new era with more nuance.

[33]

~~It was simply a desire to travel,~~ but it had presented itself as nothing less than a seizure, with intensely passionate and indeed hallucinatory force, turning his craving into vision. His imagination, still not at rest from the morning's hours of work, shaped for itself a paradigm of all the wonders and terrors of the manifold earth, of all that it was now suddenly striving to envisage: he saw it, saw a landscape, a tropical swampland under a cloud-swollen sky, moist and lush and monstrous, a kind of primeval wilderness of islands, morasses and muddy alluvial channels; far and wide around him he saw hairy palm-trunks thrusting upward from rank jungles of fern, from among thick fleshy plants in exuberant flower; saw strangely misshapen trees with roots that arched through the air before sinking into the ground or into stagnant shadowy-green glassy waters where milk-white blossoms floated as big as plates, and among them exotic birds with grotesque beaks stood hunched in the shallows; their heads tilted motionlessly sideways; saw between the knotted stems of the bamboo thicket the glinting eyes of a crouching tiger; and his heart throbbed with terror and mysterious longing.

So he analyzes it more...recognizing it as powerful.

That's a Thomas Mann sentence. A luxurious, Wagnerian line of expression. Putting together pictures of what the Expressionists are yearning for, in nature somewhere, somewhere else—in

the tropics, in primitive worlds other than the city.

Yearning to get away from discipline, order, high strung world that he represents. He manages passion, but now is starting to subsume himself within it. So the jungle imagery could also be a sign of the ID as Freud was starting to explain Westerners needed to recognize.

That's what comes out in the next section.

Westerners too caught up in the culture of materialism, work, people are not opening themselves to life and inner experience. Mann's "type" is too repressed. He has never left "Europe"—been holed up. It was time for the "enslaved emotion" to "take revenge on him." "This longing for the distant and the new, this craving for liberation, realxation, and forgetfulness" [Baudelaire had same desire.]—"it had been, he was bound to admit, an urge to escape, to run away fro his writing, away from the humdrum of his cold, inflexible, passionate duty." {198}

So he decides to finally act on it.

[35]

the receptive world. He dreaded spending the summer in the country, alone in that little house with the maid who prepared his meals and the servant who brought them to him; dreaded the familiar profile of the mountain summits and mountain walls which would once again surround his slow discontented toil. So what did he need? An interlude, some impromptu living, some *dolce far niente*, the invigoration of a distant climate, to make his summer bearable and fruitful. Very well then—he would travel. Not all that far, not quite to where the tigers were. A night in the wagon-lit and a siesta of three or four weeks at some popular holiday resort in the charming south.

He compromises, but will go “South”: drawing on another common “German” theme of the “Drang nach Süden” that arguably began with Duerer and other Renaissance era figures, but culminated (until this story) with Goethe’s Italian Travels—where Germans escape from “Germaness” for a while and breath the Mediterranean spirit—before they start longing to go back home.

Then comes more on his background, he is the author of very serious histories and literary theory--actually works that Mann had considered undertaking himself: including the life of Frederick of Prussia, etc. {200} [36]

The author of the lucid and massive prose-epic about the life of Frederic of Prussia; the patient artist who with long toil had woven the great tapestry of the novel called *Maya*, so rich in characters, gathering so many human destinies together under the shadow of one idea; the creator of that powerful tale entitled *A Study in Abjection*, which earned the gratitude of a whole younger generation by pointing to the possibility of moral resolution even for those who have plumbed the depths of knowledge; the author (lastly but not least in this summary enumeration of his maturer works) of that passionate treatise *Intellect and Art* which in its ordering energy and antithetical eloquence has led serious critics to place it immediately alongside Schiller’s disquisition *On Naive and Reflective Literature*: in a word, Gustav Aschenbach.

Then we learn of his “serious” Germanic patrimony: [Leitmotiv] {200} [37]

“His ancestors...

On Naive and Reflective Literature: in a word, Gustav Aschenbach, was born in L . . . , an important city in the province of Silesia, as the son of a highly-placed legal official. His ancestors had been military officers, judges, government administrators; men who had spent their disciplined, decently austere life in the service of the king and the state. A more inward spirituality had

So there is the background of north German, Prussian, iron discipline and austerity. Which Mann would have considered his

own **bloodline**.

But then came "a strain.... [SAME SLIDE]

shown itself in one of them who had been a preacher; a strain of livelier, more sensuous blood had entered the family in the previous generation with the writer's mother, the daughter of a director of music from Bohemia. Certain exotic racial characteristics in his external appearance had come to him from her. It was from this marriage between hard-working, sober conscientiousness and darker, more fiery impulses that an artist, and indeed this particular kind of artist, had come into being.

So there is this Leitmotiv of a duality, which was his personal dichotomy, but which he transforms into a symbol for the state of Western civilization at the time, waiting to see which side would be victorious. Up to this point, he seems to be saying, this austerity and rationalism has been victorious. You could say that the new Reich has been operating in these terms as Germany rose to industrial prominence. But underneath it all, these other elements were seething and could come out in either positive or negative ways. So painters, musicians, and authors are saying that they had to be careful to see what would happen if these things emerged, or blew up after being so long repressed. The goal is a Nietzschean effort to release them in creative ways... but that is not yet certain.

Then comes an incredible metaphor that I remember in my life often. The description of a friend who remarked. Great image: "You see...{201} [38]

youth's idleness, its carefree negligent ways. When in his thirty-fifth year he fell ill in Vienna, a subtle observer remarked of him on a social occasion, "You see, Aschenbach has always only lived like *this*"—and the speaker closed the fingers of his left hand tightly into a fist—"and never like *this*"—and he let his open hand hang comfortably down along the back of the chair. It was a correct observation, and the morally courageous aspect of

OK, back to the theme of Wanderlust: "He was haunted by an inner impulse that still had no clear direction." It is still nebulous, not clear.

If one wanted to travel overnight to somewhere incomparable, to a fantastic mutation of normal reality, where did one go? [...] Venice." [Discuss Venice.] {207} [39]

that he had not yet come to his journey's end. He was haunted by an inner impulse that still had no clear direction; he studied shipping timetables, looked up one place after another—and suddenly his surprising yet at the same time self-evident destination stared him in the face. If one wanted to travel overnight to somewhere incomparable, to a fantastic mutation of normal reality, where did one go? Why, the answer was obvious. What was he doing here? He had gone completely astray. That was where he had wanted to travel. He at once gave notice of departure from his present, mischosen stopping place. Ten days after his arrival on the island, in the early morning mist, a rapid motor-launch carried him and his luggage back over the water to the naval base, and here he landed only to re-embark immediately, crossing the gangway onto the damp deck of a ship that was waiting under steam to leave for Venice.

Venice is the compromise: something that is exotic but not too far. And that was Venice's reputation ever since the 18th century. A lugubrious "Las Vegas." What happened in Venice, stayed in Venice—and may have happened under the remarkable masks and costumes of Carnevale. Moreover, Venice was for Mann a symbol of coming to an end, as Wagner had died there. Everything in a Mann story has such personal, cultural, historical significance.

So, off to exotic Venice.

Now, on the ship. Aschenbach, at midlife, approaching a crisis, observes people (as the writer always does—gathering/stealing material from any situation. (Anything is legitimately grist for Mann's mill: family trips to Venice, but also his sister's suicide, recognizing desire for his own son, etc.)"

Here he sees a man about his own age dressed up and trying to hang out with younger guys, which he considers ridiculous.

"But as soon as...

Resting one elbow on the handrail, he watched the idle crowd hanging about the quayside to see the ship's departure, and watched the passengers who had come aboard. Those with second-class tickets were squatting, men and women together, on the forward deck, using boxes and bundles as seats. The company on the upper deck consisted of a group of young men, probably shop or office workers from Pola, a high-spirited party about to set off on an excursion to Italy. They were making a considerable exhibition of themselves and their enterprise, chattering, laughing, fatuously enjoying their own gesticulations, leaning overboard and shouting glibly derisive ribaldries at their friends on the harbor-side street, who were hurrying about their business with briefcases under their arms and waved their sticks peevishly at the holiday-makers. One of the party, who wore a light yellow summer suit of extravagant cut, a scarlet necktie and a rakishly tilted Panama hat, was the most conspicuous of them all in his shrill hilarity. But as soon as Aschenbach took a slightly closer look at him, he realized with a kind of horror that the man's youth was false. He was old, there was no mistaking it. There were wrinkles round his eyes and mouth. His cheeks' faint carmine was rouge, the brown hair under his straw hat with its colored ribbon was a wig, his neck was flaccid and scrawny, his small stuck-on moustache and the little imperial on his chin were

[41]

“Did they not know...

small stuck-on moustache and the little imperial on his chin were dyed, his yellowish full complement of teeth, displayed when he laughed, were a cheap artificial set, and his hands, with signet rings on both index fingers, were those of an old man. With a spasm of distaste Aschenbach watched him as he kept company with his young friends. Did they not know, did they not notice that he was old, that he had no right to be wearing foppish and garish clothes like theirs, no right to be acting as if he were one of them? They seemed to be tolerating his presence among them as something habitual and to be taken for granted, they treated him as an equal, reciprocated without embarrassment when he teasingly poked them in the ribs. How was this possible? Aschenbach put his hand over his forehead and closed his eyes,

He considers this pathetic, but it actually foreshadows his own end... It is a physical symbol of the decline and crisis that is coming.

Then things shift from this external observation into internal musings. This happens throughout the book, whether it is a dream, or a daydream, or a subtle recognition of feelings that we are usually in too much of a hurry to notice. But Mann, Nietzsche, Wagner, and Freud are saying that we need to pay attention to them. And Aschenbach does

[42]

“He had a feeling that...

which were hot from too little sleep. He had a feeling that something not quite usual was beginning to happen, that the world was undergoing a dreamlike alienation, becoming increasingly deranged and bizarre, and that perhaps this process might be arrested if he were to cover his face for a little and then take a fresh look at things. But at that moment he had the sensation of being afloat, and starting up in irrational alarm, he noticed that

Let's say he has a "dizzy" moment—which then continues as he wavers between wakefulness and sleep. [43]

Wrapped in his overcoat, a book lying on his lap, the traveler rested, scarcely noticing the hours as they passed him by. It had stopped raining; the canvas shelter was removed. The horizon was complete. Under the turbid dome of the sky the desolate sea surrounded him in an enormous circle. But in empty, unarticulated space our mind loses its sense of time as well, and we enter the twilight of the immeasurable. As Aschenbach lay there, strange and shadowy figures, the foppish old man, the goat-bearded purser from the ship's interior, passed with uncertain gestures and confused dream-words through his mind, and he fell asleep.

From the Romantics, like William Wordsworth, this moment where you drift off into sleep is pivotal—an intersection between the conscious and the subconscious. Here Mann puts it in very direct words. I would say that the same is at work in the images of the Expressionist artists—registering the fleeting interactions between what is going on and what you feel about it.

Here, of course, is Warrington's reflection on all that was going on as Aschenbach traveled south.

01 Aschenbach Aboard [44]



Moving along, as I see the sequence of Warrington's imagery, we have the positive arrival in Venice [45], namely, at Saint Mark's Square:

Thus it was that he saw it once more, that most astonishing of all landing places, that dazzling composition of fantastic architecture which the Republic presented to the admiring gaze of approaching seafarers: the unburdened splendor of the Ducal Palace; the Bridge of Sighs, the lion and the saint on their two columns at the water's edge, the magnificently projecting side wing of the fabulous basilica, the vista beyond it of the gate tower and the Giants' Clock; and as he contemplated it all he reflected that to arrive in Venice by land, at the station, was like entering a palace by a back door: that only as he was now doing, only by ship, over the high sea, should one come to this most extraordinary of cities.

02 Piazza San Marco [46]



But, immediately thereafter, he shifts to an image of foreboding:

[47]

“CAN THERE BE ANYONE WHO HAS NOT HAD TO OVERCOME A FLEETING...

sense of dread, a secret shudder or uneasiness, on stepping for the first time or after a long interval of years into a Venetian gondola? How strange a vehicle it is, coming down unchanged from times of old romance, and so characteristically black, the way no other thing is black except a coffin—a vehicle evoking lawless adventures in the plashing stillness of night, and still more strongly evoking death itself, the bier, the dark obsequies, the last silent journey! And has it been observed that the seat of

Another image to get under the surface—reminding us of the darker side of Venice, associated with Wagner’s death, etc.

05 Dark Gondola [48]



In hotel, he immerses himself in the crowd, *a la* Baudelaire. “The observations and encounters of a devotee of solitude and silence are at once less distinct and more penetrating than those of the sociable man; his thoughts are weightier, stranger, and never without a tinge of sadness [...] The fruit of solitude is originality, something daringly and disconcertingly beautiful, the poetic creation. But the fruit of solitude can also be the perverse, the disproportionate, the absurd and the forbidden [...] It was no doubt this very paradox that made them disturbing.” {215}

In this mood, he first sees Tadzio.

[49]

It was a group of adolescent and barely adult young people, sitting round a cane table under the supervision of a governess or companion: three young girls, of fifteen to seventeen as it seemed, and a long-haired boy of about fourteen. With astonishment Aschenbach noticed that the boy was entirely beautiful. His countenance, pale and gracefully reserved, was surrounded by ringlets of honey-colored hair, and with its straight nose, its enchanting mouth, its expression of sweet and divine gravity, it recalled Greek sculpture of the noblest period; yet despite the

Tadzio is 14: so was Gretchen, in Goethe’s Faust!! {216}

But at first the associations he makes are Classical, and Apollonian, not Romantic and Dionysian. This will change through the story.

[50]

More of this weaving together of interactions between what is

happening externally with what is being felt internally. Like Nietzsche, Freud, Klimt, all Western intellectuals, he taps into Classical references to set forth his views.

took his seat; and now especially, as his profile was exactly turned to the watching Aschenbach, the latter was again amazed, indeed startled, by the truly godlike beauty of this human creature. Today the boy was wearing a light casual suit of blue and white striped linen material with a red silk breast-knot, closing at the neck in a simple white stand-up collar. But on this collar—which did not even match the rest of the suit very elegantly—there, like a flower in bloom, his head was gracefully resting. It was the head of Eros, with the creamy luster of Parian marble, the brows fine-drawn and serious, the temples and ear darkly and softly covered by the neat right-angled growth of the curling hair.

Intricate details—impressionistic accuracy, almost like a photograph, combined with Classical symbolism. All of the direct intimate detail is combined, symbolically with the inclusion of the “head of Eros.” Like Freud using references to Eros, Thanatos, Oedipus, etc., Mann was weaving together real feelings felt in the present time with high cultural references.

Remember too that it is true that Mann went to Venice (with his family), saw the man on the boat, lost his luggage, and saw this boy. He drew from his real experiences to produce all of this!

[51]

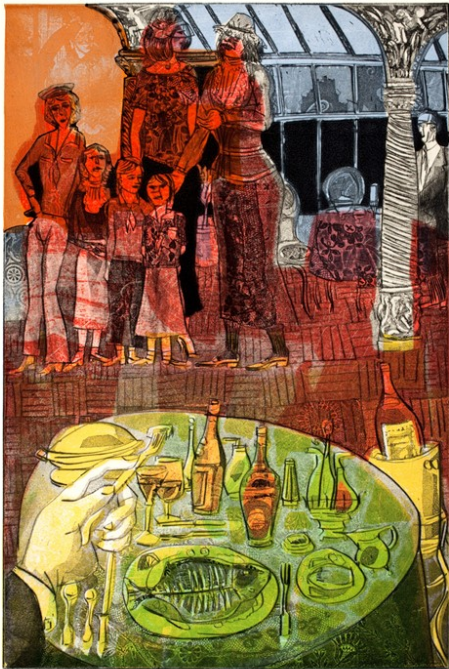


[52]



And here is Warrington's image of the "moment"—directly from Aschenbach's perspective!!

03 Tadzio[53]



Now, Mann does not go as far as others of this era in capturing pure stream of consciousness—like James Joyce and Marcel Proust. But he does provide an ongoing sense of the fluidity of thought. Aschenbach floats from desire to desire, changing his mindset constantly through time. This is almost an example of literary stream of consciousness, but Mann presented it within his

"shell" of realism.

Below: Romantic thoughts of the sea, "a longing for the unarticulated and immeasurable, for eternity, for nothingness," then shift back to "the beautiful boy." {221}

[54]

"There were profound reasons...

Well, I shall stay, thought Aschenbach. What better place could I find? And with his hands folded in his lap, he let his eyes wander in the wide expanse of the sea, let his gaze glide away, dissolve and die in the monotonous haze of this desolate emptiness. There were profound reasons for his attachment to the sea, he loved it because as a hard-working artist he needed rest, needed to escape from the demanding complexity of phenomena and lie hidden on the bosom of the simple and tremendous; because of a forbidden longing deep within him that ran quite contrary to his life's task and was for that very reason seductive, a longing for the unarticulated and immeasurable, for eternity, for nothingness. To rest in the arms of perfection is the desire of any man intent upon creating excellence; and is not nothingness a form of perfection? But now, as he mused idly on such profound matters, the horizontal line of the sea's shore was suddenly intersected by a human figure, and when he had retrieved his gaze from limitless immensity and concentrated it again, he beheld the beautiful boy, coming from the left and walking past him across the sand. He walked barefoot, ready for

The next major section covers Aschenbach's effort to "escape" from the feelings he is beginning to sense. He decides that he needs to leave, and even packs up and sets out. But through it, he is conflicted...wondering, "Should I stay or should I go?" Clearly, in this, we get the sense of confusion within a soul split between "multiple personalities."

But in the end, on the way out, his baggage is misdirected: "A wild joy, and unbelievable feeling of hilarity, shook him almost convulsively from the depths of his heart. [...] How unbelievably strange an experience it was, how shaming, how like a dream in its bizarre comedy [...]"

Once again, then, he experiences a process of negotiation within himself After his return, he "shakes his head with displeasure at his irresolution, his ignorance of his own wishes." So, he is AWARE of Nietzsche's point that we are always fighting within our selves—and usually can't come to realization about what we really want...

But in this case, he does:

Eventually, seeing Tadzio again, he

[55]..

“felt the casual greeting die on his lips...

from the sea, through the beach barrier and along the boarded walks back to the hotel. From up here at his window Aschenbach recognized him at once, before he had even looked at him properly, and some such thought came to him as: Why, Tadzio, there you are again too! But at the same instant he felt that casual greeting die on his lips, stricken dumb by the truth in his heart—he felt the rapturous kindling of his blood, the joy and the anguish of his soul, and realized that it was because of Tadzio that it had been so hard for him to leave. *Subconscious*

So, he has taken a further step toward self-awareness. I am attracted to him and that's why I didn't want to go. He is allowing himself to think things he couldn't think: moving from subconscious, to semi-conscious, to conscious.

[56]

Now day after day the god with the burning cheeks soared naked, driving his four fire-breathing steeds through the spaces of heaven, and now, too, his yellow-gold locks fluttered wide in the outstorming east wind. Silk-white radiance gleamed on the slow-swelling deep's vast waters. The sand glowed. Under the

This is not clear but it seems to be an image of the joy becoming more intense, the passionate arising. Apollo, the sun god, is turning toward his more decadent rather than “structured” form.

Now he is becoming enchanted: “a delightful vision came to him, spun from the seas murmur and the glittering sunlight. ...”

But he continues to use Athenian imagery, referring back to Socrates and Phaedrus: classical symbols of what Oscar Wilde called the “love that hath no name”—Platonic relationships between older and younger men. {235}

[57]

“It was the old plane tree not far from the walls of Athens...

such were the emotions of which he grew capable. And a delightful vision came to him, spun from the sea's murmur and the glittering sunlight. It was the old plane tree not far from the walls of Athens—that place of sacred shade, fragrant with chaste-tree blossoms; adorned with sacred statues and pious gifts in honor of the nymphs and of Achelous. The stream trickled crystal clear over smooth pebbles at the foot of the great spreading tree; the crickets made their music. But on the grass, which sloped down gently so that one could hold up one's head as one lay, there reclined two men, sheltered here from the heat of the noonday: one elderly and one young, one ugly and one beautiful, the wise beside the desirable. And Socrates, wooing him with witty compliments and jests, was instructing Phaedrus on desire and virtue. He spoke to him of the burning tremor of fear which

And then, he “suddenly desired to write.”

[58]

So, his next move is to try to sublimate this passion, to channel it in the direction of creative work.

“Eros indeed...

Then “what he craved..”

before Beauty. He suddenly desired to write. Eros indeed, we are told, loves idleness and is born only for the idle. But at this point of Aschenbach's crisis and visitation his excitement was driving him to produce. The occasion was almost a matter of indifference. An inquiry, an invitation to express a personal opinion on a certain important cultural problem, a burning question of taste, had been circulated to the intellectual world and had been forwarded to him on his travels. The theme was familiar to him, it was close to his experience; the desire to illuminate it in his own words was suddenly irresistible. And what he craved, indeed, was to work on it in Tadzio's presence, to take the boy's physique for a model as he wrote, to let his style follow the lineaments of this body which he saw as divine, and to carry its beauty on high into the spiritual world, as the eagle once carried the Trojan shepherd boy up into the ether. Never had he felt the joy of the word more sweetly, never had he known so clearly that Eros dwells in language, as during those perilously precious

This is a Nietzschean notion. You don't know where the drive to create comes from. It may come from “Dangerous” non-“bourgeois” sources of inspiration. Mann is expressing this even more clearly. His writing is coming out of his erotic desire for Tadzio—unspeakable motivation.

[59]

“It is well...

many. It is as well that the world knows only a fine piece of work and not also its origins, the conditions under which it came into being; for knowledge of the sources of an artist's inspiration would often confuse readers and shock them, and the excellence of the writing would be of no avail. How strange those hours were! How strangely exhausting that labor! How mysterious this act of intercourse and begetting between a mind and a body! When Aschenbach put away his work and left the beach, he felt worn out, even broken, and his conscience seemed to be reproaching him as if after some kind of debauch.

That is almost a quotation from Nietzsche—that the impulse to create may be even “criminal,” though readers may never know it.

On the following morning, he finds himself passing by Tadzio and attempts to act on his desires.

[60]

“he was just about...

on the boarded way behind the bathing cabins, he was just about to lay his hand on his head or his shoulder, and some phrase or other, some friendly words in French were on the tip of his tongue—when he felt his heart, perhaps partly because he had been walking fast, hammering wildly inside him, felt so breathless that he would only have been able to speak in a strangled and trembling voice. He hesitated, struggled to control himself, then was suddenly afraid that he had already been walking too long close behind the beautiful boy, afraid that Tadzio would notice this, that he would turn and look at him questioningly; he made one more attempt, failed, gave up, and hurried past with his head bowed.

Too late! he thought at that moment. Too late! But was it too

That's the crux of it, and so many of the other stories. He is becoming aware, conscious of his desires, his true nature, realizing what Nietzsche encourages late-nineteenth century people to do. But will he be able to act on it?

The answer in almost all of Mann's stories is... no. They result in mockery, shameful retreat, collapse, or even suicide.

Are we ready to become the “Super” or “Next” Man? Generally, Mann seems to be saying we probably can't. It's a terrible self-revelation on his own part. At 37 he is probably telling himself that “I'm not going to be able to become myself. I'm not going to ever be fully satisfied.”

That tension will continue through the rest of his life. He is never going to openly be the person that he is. This is an example of this. He hesitates. He can't go through with it.

But, he later thinks that Tadzio smiled at him, and this triggers in him an even deeper response.

[61]

smiled: smiled at him, speakingly, familiarly, enchantingly and quite unabashed, with his lips parting slowly as the smile was formed. It was the smile of Narcissus as he bows his head over the mirroring water, that profound, fascinated, protracted smile with which he reaches out his arms toward the reflection of his own beauty—a very slightly contorted smile, contorted by the hopelessness of his attempt to kiss the sweet lips of his shadow; a smile that was provocative, curious and imperceptibly troubled, bewitched and bewitching.

He who had received this smile carried it quickly away with him like a fateful gift. He was so deeply shaken that he was forced to flee the lighted terrace and the front garden and hurry into the darkness of the park at the rear. Words struggled from his lips, strangely indignant and tender reproaches: "You mustn't smile like that! One mustn't, do you hear, mustn't smile like that at anyone!" He sank down on one of the seats, deliriously breathing the nocturnal fragrance of the flowers and trees. And leaning back, his arms hanging down, overwhelmed, trembling, shuddering all over, he whispered the standing formula of the heart's desire—impossible here, absurd, depraved, ludicrous and

So... all the things that "respectable" society would have said of the feeling he was experiencing... But...

sacred nevertheless, still worthy of honor even here: "I love you!"

He can't act on it, but it is powerful

I'm not going to go extensively to the issue of the cholera outbreak that is happening in the background. But it is symbolic of his breakdown. He becomes alert that this illness is starting to infect Venice, but he doesn't say anything and he doesn't leave. It is a kind of suicide pact with Tadzio...similar to the concept of "Liebestod," with images of couples, such as Romeo and Juliet and Tristan and Isolde, passing into the beyond...together.

News of the actually cholera excites him at first—because it will shake the world as his soul was being shaken! [Actually, Nietzsche responded similarly to thoughts of a devastating earthquake striking Nice!]

[62]

Aschenbach in some agitation, throwing the newspapers back on the table. "They're hushing this up!" But at the same time his heart filled with elation at the thought of the adventure in which the outside world was about to be involved. For to passion, as to crime, the assured everyday order and stability of things is not opportune, and any weakening of the civil structure, any chaos and disaster afflicting the world, must be welcome to it, as offering a vague hope of turning such circumstances to its advantage. Thus Aschenbach felt an obscure sense of satisfaction at what was going on in the dirty alleyways of Venice, cloaked in official secrecy—this guilty secret of the city, which merged with his own innermost secret and which it was also so much in his own interests to protect. For in his enamored state his one anxiety was that Tadzio might leave, and he realized with a kind of horror that he would not be able to go on living if that were to happen.

But his worry that Tadzio might leave, and hesitation to warn anyone, constitutes a form of "Liebestod" 242}

08 I Feel Sick [63]



Now the madness, or desire, or breakdown, is starting to overtake him. He is just following the boy around, aware of the danger surrounding them, the impending crisis and sense of death... and the classical imagery begins to shift from Apollo to Dionysus:

[64]

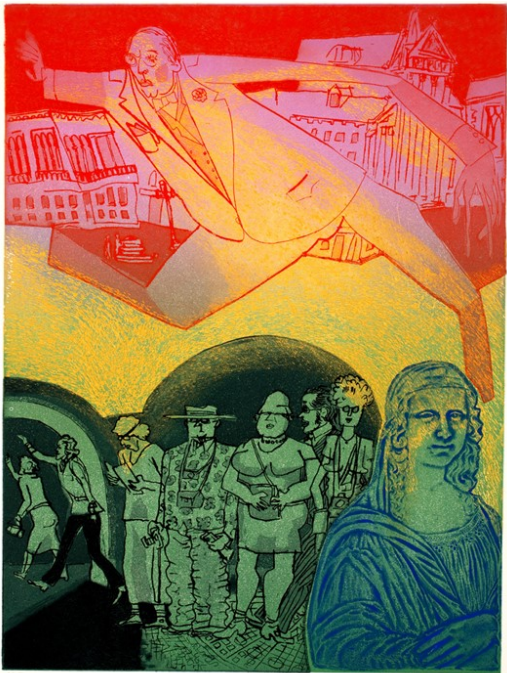
"His head and heart were drunk, and his steps followed the

dictates of that dark god whose pleasure it is to trample man's reason and dignity underfoot."

and walk through the clock tower gateway into the Merceria, and after letting them get a little way ahead he would follow them—follow them furtively on their walk through Venice. He had to stop when they lingered, had to take refuge in hot food stalls and courtyards to let them pass when they turned round; he would lose them, search for them frantically and exhaustingly, rushing over bridges and along filthy culs-de-sac, and would then have to endure minutes of mortal embarrassment when he suddenly saw them coming toward him in a narrow passageway where no escape was possible. And yet one cannot say that he suffered. His head and his heart were drunk, and his steps followed the dictates of that dark god whose pleasure it is to trample man's reason and dignity underfoot.

Losing control: "He could no longer think of anything or want anything except this ceaseless pursuit of the object that so inflamed him."

04 Pursuit] [65]



Amid his pursuits, Tadzio and his family occasionally get into Gondolas, he follows them in those too.

[66]

Here, the imagery that Warrington created, linking the gondola to psychological malaise and even coffin like death brings the two

major Gondola references together.

Presently, somewhere or other, Tadzio and his family would take a gondola, and while they were getting into it Aschenbach, hiding behind a fountain or the projecting part of a building, would wait till they were a little way from the shore and then do the same. Speaking hurriedly and in an undertone, he would instruct the oarsman, promising him a large tip, to follow that gondola ahead of them that was just turning the corner, to follow it at a discreet distance; and a shiver would run down his spine when the fellow, with the roguish compliance of a pander, would answer him in the same tone, assuring him that he was at his service, entirely at his service.

Thus he glided and swayed gently along, reclining on soft black cushions, shadowing that other black, beaked craft, chained to its pursuit by his infatuation. Sometimes he would lose sight of it and become distressed and anxious, but his steersman, who seemed to be well practiced in commissions of this kind, would always know some cunning maneuver, some side-canal or short cut that would again bring Aschenbach in sight of what he craved. The air was stagnant and malodorous, the sun burned oppressively through the haze that had turned the sky to the color of slate. Water lapped against wood and stone. The gondolier's call, half warning and half greeting, was answered from a distance out of the silent labyrinth, in accordance with some strange convention. Out of little overhead gardens umbelliferous blossoms spilled over and hung down the crumbling masonry, white and purple and almond scented. Moorish windows were mirrored in the murky water. The marble steps of a church dipped below

05 Dark Gondola [Again] [67]



The yearning was becoming too great: "Where is this leading me? He would reflect in consternation at such moments." {245}

He realizes that this is all a complete breakdown of his ancestral, "bourgeois" background, that he was indeed becoming "degenerate," which is the word that would have been used at the time for his nature.

[68]

Nevertheless, there were moments at which he paused and half came to his senses. Where is this leading me! he would reflect in consternation at such moments. Where was it leading him! Like any man whose natural merits move him to take an aristocratic interest in his origins, Aschenbach habitually let the achievements and successes of his life remind him of his ancestors, for in imagination he could then feel sure of their approval, of their satisfaction, of the respect they could not have withheld. And he thought of them even here and now, entangled as he was in so impermissible an experience, involved in such exotic extravagances of feeling; he thought, with a sad smile, of their dignified austerity, their decent manliness of character. What would they say? But for that matter, what would they have said about his entire life, a life that had deviated from theirs to the point of degeneracy, this life of his in the compulsive service of art, this life about which he himself, adopting the civic values of his

Almost as a moment of "comic relief" in all of this--[Believe it or not, one can find oneself laughing hysterically at certain moments of Mann's stories!!--some strolling musicians perform in front of his hotel. He would normally have rejected the "popular" songs, but he immerses himself in it--another sign of "decline": "His nervous system greeily drank in the jangling tones, for passion paralyzes discrimination and responds in all seriousness to stimuli which the sober senses would either treat with humorous tolerance or impatiently reject." {248}

Then, the musician laughs at him (and his inquiries about the cholera). Moments like this often occur in Mann's stories as some outsider will recognize and mock the discomfort of the sufferer and his absurd condition. [Compare with the child in Tristan]

[69]

It was a song that Aschenbach could not remember ever having heard before; a bold hit in an unintelligible dialect, and having a laughing refrain in which the rest of the band regularly and loudly joined. At this point both the words and the instrumental accompaniment stopped, and nothing remained except a burst of laughter, to some extent rhythmically ordered but treated with a high degree of naturalism, the soloist in particular showing great talent in his lifelike rendering of it. With artistic distance restored between himself and the spectators, he had recovered all his impudence, and the simulated laughter which he shamelessly directed at the terrace was a laughter of mockery. Even before the end of the articulated part of each stanza he

06 Strolling Singers[70]



But soon thereafter comes the crucial phase of the story.

Here is where we have the full shift over into Expressionistic, Freudian, Nietzschean representation of the subconscious at work—coming to full bore in his dreams.

: [71]

“That night...

That night he had a terrible dream; if dream is the right word for a bodily and mental experience which did indeed overtake him during deepest sleep, in complete independence of his will and with complete sensuous vividness, but with no perception of himself as present and moving about in any space external to the events themselves; rather, the scene of the events was his own soul, and they irrupted into it from outside, violently defeating his resistance—a profound, intellectual resistance—as they passed

Here it comes: the Dionysian dreamscape of emotional turmoil.

Think expressionistic painting, expressionistic music, words for actually describing the mad, orgiastic drives that exist beneath the surface: all the senses, visuals, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, ...

[72]

through him, and leaving his whole being, the culture of a lifetime, devastated and destroyed.

It began with fear, fear and joy and a horrified curiosity about what was to come. It was night, and his senses were alert; for from far off a hubbub was approaching, an uproar, a compendium of noise, a clangor and blare and dull thundering, yells of exultation and a particular howl with a long-drawn-out *u* at the end—all of it permeated and dominated by a terrible sweet sound of flute music: by deep-warbling, infamously persistent, shamelessly clinging tones that bewitched the innermost heart. Yet he was aware of a word, an obscure word, but one that gave a name to what was coming: "the stranger-god!" There was a glow of smoky fire: in it he could see a mountain landscape, like the mountains round his summer home. And in fragmented light, from wooded heights, between tree trunks and mossy boulders, it came tumbling and whirling down: a human and animal swarm, a raging rout, flooding the slope with bodies, with flames, with tumult and frenzied dancing. Women, stumbling on the hide garments that fell too far about them from the waist, held up tambourines and moaned as they shook them above their thrown-

[73]

back heads; they swung blazing torches, scattering the sparks, and brandished naked daggers; they carried snakes with flickering tongues which they had seized in the middle of the body, or they bore up their own breasts in both hands, shrieking as they did so. Men with horns over their brows, hairy-skinned and girdled with pelts, bowed their necks and threw up their arms and thighs, clanging brazen cymbals and beating a furious tattoo on drums, while smooth-skinned boys prodded goats with leafy staves, clinging to their horns and yelling with delight as the leaping beasts dragged them along. And the god's enthusiasts howled out the cry with the soft consonants and long-drawn-out final *u*, sweet and wild both at once, like no cry that was ever heard: here it was raised, belled out into the air as by rutting stags, and there they threw it back with many voices, in ribald triumph, urging each other on with it to dancing and tossing of limbs, and never did it cease. But the deep, enticing flute music mingled irresistibly with everything. Was it not also enticing him, the dreamer who experienced all this while struggling not to, enticing him with shameless insistence to the feast and frenzy of the uttermost surrender? Great was his loathing, great his fear, honorable his effort of will to defend to the last what was his and ~~protect it against the Stranger, against the enemy of the com-~~

[74]

posed and dignified intellect. But the noise, the howling grew louder, with the echoing cliffs reiterating it: it increased beyond measure, swelled up to an enrapturing madness. Odors besieged the mind, the pungent reek of the goats, the scent of panting bodies and an exhalation as of staling waters, with another smell, too, that was familiar: that of wounds and wandering disease. His heart throbbed to the drumbeats, his brain whirled, a fury seized him, a blindness, a dizzying lust, and his soul craved to join the round-dance of the god. The obscene symbol, wooden and gigantic, was uncovered and raised on high: and still more unbridled grew the howling of the rallying-cry. With foaming mouths they raged, they roused each other with lewd gestures and licentious hands, laughing and moaning they thrust the prods into each other's flesh and licked the blood from each other's limbs. But the dreamer now was with them and in them, he belonged to the Stranger-God. Yes, they were himself as they flung themselves, tearing and slaying, on the animals and devoured steaming gobbets of flesh; they were himself as an orgy of limitless coupling, in homage to the god, began on the trampled, mossy ground. And his very soul savored the lascivious delirium of annihilation.

We have clearly gone from Apollonian to Dionysian. Indeed, I would say, Mann stepped--in his own way--into the world of the "abstract," where all imagery has become blended into pure emotion--though he uses words rather than paint. This is the literary equivalent of the rough-hewn, raw style of the Expressionist painters and points in the direction of expression utterly liberated from clear imagery, such as in Kandinsky's painting and Schoenberg's music.

However it is done, Mann is telling us what is going on under the "thin crust" of Western civilization. The story has led to this moment where the subconscious has overwhelmed reason, in his dream. Freud's inner truth of instinctive drives competing to create and destroy. His character's mid-life crisis has manifested itself in his dream life. He desired the Primitive elsewhere, but it was present within--as the Expressionist creators were trying to tell us in everything they painted, composed, wrote. They were demanding that we be very honest about these things. Here is this hyper refined, hyper controlled, north German, protestant Thomas Mann using his skills to describe what was going on beneath the surface, to be more open about his own desires that "could not be named"--but not his alone...

07 A Frightful Dream [75]



At some level, everything up to this point has been in some ways, positive. Aschenbach has become more self-aware and has attempted to sublimated it through creativity. Though “decadent” he has done what Freud and Nietzsche and many others of the day had been calling for. This dream is an intense statement of that.

One might expect that the conclusion could be some kind of optimistic clarion call—like Richard Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*—for the “next” man. Now he will step forward, become himself, come out of the closet and move forward in a new world that won’t hold him back any more.

But, Thomas Mann looks at himself, and other products of Western civilization, and essentially says that despite all the indications that we are getting from Nietzsche and Freud and the Expressionists, I don’t think that my character--or even I—can turn the corner. None of his characters make it. They almost all suffer dire consequences: either committing suicide, out of shame, or become clowns, also in shame.

So, really, Mann’s sense seems to have been, “not yet.” And Gustav Aschenbach’s end is tragically symbolic of this.

In the next phase, he sadly becomes a parody of himself—doing precisely what he ridiculed when he saw his predecessor on the boat: what he swore he would never do.

He goes to an Italian barber and, when offered to have his hair colored, and make up applied, to look younger—he says, go ahead.

[76]

Like any other lover, he desired to please and bitterly dreaded that he might fail to do so. He added brightening and rejuvenating touches to his clothes, he wore jewelery and used scent, he devoted long sessions to his toilet several times a day, arriving at table elaborately attired and full of excited expectation. As he beheld the sweet youthful creature who had so entranced him he felt disgust at his own aging body, the sight of his gray hair and sharp features filled him with a sense of shame and hopelessness. He felt a compulsive need to refresh and restore himself physically; he paid frequent visits to the hotel barber.

[77]

After all, we are only as old as we feel in our minds and hearts, and sometimes gray hair is actually further from the truth than the despised corrective would be. In your case, signore, one has a right to the natural color of one's hair. Will you permit me simply to give your color back to you?"

"How so?" asked Aschenbach.

Whereupon the eloquent tempter washed his client's hair in two kinds of water, one clear and one dark; and his hair was as black as when he had been young. Then he folded it into soft waves with the curling tongs, stepped back and surveyed his handiwork.

"Now the only other thing," he said, "would be just to freshen up the signore's complexion a little."

And like a craftsman unable to finish, unable to satisfy himself, he passed busily and indefatigably from one procedure to another. Aschenbach, reclining comfortably, incapable of resistance, filled rather with exciting hopes by what was happening, gazed at the glass and saw his eyebrows arched more clearly and evenly, the shape of his eyes lengthened, their brightness en-

[78]

hanced by a slight underlining of the lids; saw below them a delicate carmine come to life as it was softly applied to skin that had been brown and leathery; saw his lips that had just been so pallid now burgeoning cherry-red; saw the furrows on his cheeks, round his mouth, the wrinkles by his eyes, all vanishing under face cream and an aura of youth—with beating heart he saw himself as a young man in his earliest bloom. The cosmetician finally declared himself satisfied, with the groveling politeness usual in such people, by profusely thanking the client he had served. "An insignificant adjustment, signore," he said as he gave a final helping hand to Aschenbach's outward appearance. "Now the signore can fall in love as soon as he pleases." And the spellbound lover departed, confused and timorous but happy as in a dream. His necktie was scarlet, his broad-brimmed straw hat encircled with a many-colored ribbon.

09 Barber Shop (258-9) [79]



Ultimately, then, painted up in this way, sitting on the beach, and evidently suffering from the effects of cholera, Aschenbach fades away, watching Tadzio from a distance.

[80]

“At the edge of the sea he lingered...

ing. Then he stood right up and walked slowly away. His friends called to him, laughingly at first, then anxiously and pleadingly; he took no notice. The dark-haired boy, who had no doubt been seized at once by remorse at having gone so far, ran after him and tried to make up the quarrel. A jerk of Tadzio's shoulder rejected him. Tadzio walked on at an angle down to the water. He was barefooted and wearing his striped linen costume with the red bow.

At the edge of the sea he lingered, head bowed, drawing figures in the wet sand with the point of one foot, then walked into the shallow high water, which at its deepest point did not even wet his knees; he waded through it, advancing easily, and reached the sandbar. There he stood for a moment looking out into the distance and then, moving left, began slowly to pace the length of this narrow strip of unsubmerged land. Divided from the shore by a width of water, divided from his companions by proud caprice, he walked, a quite isolated and unrelated apparition, walked with floating hair out there in the sea, in the wind, in front of the nebulous vastness. Once more he stopped to survey the scene. And suddenly, as if prompted by a memory, by an impulse, he turned at the waist, one hand on his hip, with

[81]

an enchanting twist of the body, and looked back over his shoulder at the beach. There the watcher sat, as he had sat once before when those twilight-gray eyes, looking back at him then from that other threshold, had for the first time met his. Resting his head on the back of his chair, he had slowly turned it to follow the movements of the walking figure in the distance; now he lifted it toward this last look; then it sank down on his breast, so that his eyes stared up from below, while his face wore the inert, deep-sunken expression of profound slumber. But to him it was as if the pale and lovely soul-summoner out there were smiling to him, beckoning to him; as if he loosed his hand from his hip and pointed outward, hovering ahead and onward, into an immensity rich with unutterable expectation. And as so often, he set out to follow him.

Minutes passed, after he had collapsed sideways in his chair, before anyone hurried to his assistance. He was carried to his room. And later that same day the world was respectfully shocked to receive the news of his death.

He started to move toward him, but...

10 Death on the Lido (263) [82]



It is a Liebestod: yearning, Sehnsucht, desire. But it ends in frustration. You can interpret it many ways. So I would say it continues to be a symbol that he and his generation would not be able to break through.

Was he wrong? Is the agenda not still open? Is that not, still, the fundamental “existential” problem that lives in the modern age face? Do we satisfy ourselves with the surface and its material benefits, or do they simply cover over longings that are rarely fully resolved and continue to drive people into the states of mid-life crisis and

depression.

This, I would say, is what makes Mann's *Death in Venice* *increasingly* valid, as the "global" market and consumer society expands without really opening the door to self-becoming outside of superficial and short-lived inoculations of "romantic" culture.

AFTERWORD ON MANN'S SUBSEQUENT CAREER

If we have time to go on a bit, I would tell you about how the story unfolded beyond 1912.

[83]

In many ways, we might say that Thomas's brother, Heinrich, "saw" the real implications of Mann's pessimism even more clearly.

Focusing on *political* rather than psychological manifestations, Heinrich warned in "The Loyal Subject" that unsatisfied personalities might turn to the political Right for a sense of identity and community.

[84]

Thomas did not yet see this and defended the German cause in WWI against his brother's support of 'Civilisation' via *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*.

Writes *The Magic Mountain* (1924) as representation of European culture and civilization at the cusp of WWI.

[85]

Receives Nobel Prize for Literature (1929) for *The Magic Mountain*.

Gradual acceptance of Weimar Republicanism and democracy.

Speaks out against rise of Nazism.

Must go into exile. [86]

Ultimately responds to WWII and the Holocaust in *Dr. Faustus* (1947), a work of atonement for German guilt in which he acknowledges that all German culture - all that he loves and represents so much - was tainted by horrors of Nazism. [87]

Died 1955