# Death in Venice Study Guide

## Death in Venice by Thomas Mann

BOOKRAGS

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# Introduction

Thomas Mann's initial inspiration for his novella, *Death in Venice* (1912), came from German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who fell in love with a teenage girl when he was seventy-four years old and vacationing in Marienbad. However, Mann's own trip to Venice supplied many of the details for the story. The story concerns Gustav von Aschenbach, an accomplished middle-aged writer who has dedicated his life to his art and the pursuit of beauty, and his love for Tadzio, a fourteen-year-old Polish boy vacationing with his family in Venice. Although Tadzio escapes the cholera epidemic engulfing the city, von Aschenbach does not, and he dies on the beach the day Tadzio leaves. Mann uses the story to explore the relationships between death and beauty, life and art, chaos and order—all recurring themes in his writing. Mann gives von Aschenbach German composer Gustav Mahler's first name and physical appearance, and Tadzio evokes the Greek gods Eros and Hermes, the latter of which is Mann's favorite Greek god. The "actual" Tadzio, the boy Mann saw in Venice and on whom he based his character, was identified years later as Baron Wladyslaw Moes.

Von Aschenbach also bears a remarkable similarity to Mann himself. Both live in the same Munich neighborhood, both summer in the Bavarian Alps, and both share the same work habits. Both are also heavily influenced by the classics. The novella itself, full of allusions to Greek mythology, is indebted to the *Odyssey* and Erwin Rohde's *Psyche*, an influential book on Greek religion. *Death in Venice* remains one of Mann's most popular works, appearing in numerous anthologies and in Mann's *Collected Works* (1960). It has also become a classic of gay literature, even though the story does not explicitly address homosexuality.

# Author Biography

A master of refined and tightly structured prose, and arguably one of the most important literary figures of twentieth-century Germany, Paul Thomas Mann was born June 6, 1875, in Lubeck, Germany, the second son of Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann and Julia da Silva-Bruhns, a wealthy Brazilian and daughter of a former citizen of Lubeck. Although pampered by his mother, Mann strove during childhood to please his father, a grain exporter who wanted his son to take over the family business. When his father died in 1891, the family dissolved the business and moved to Munich, where Mann attended the University of Munich, pursued a writing career, and studied the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. He published his first book, a collection of stories titled *Little Herr Friedemann* in 1898, when he was just twenty-two years old. Following in the footsteps of his older brother, Luiz Heinrich, who was developing his own career as a respected writer, Mann established a reputation as a leading writer of his generation with his next book, the sprawling family saga, *Buddenbrooks* (1901), a thinly veiled account of his own family history and Lubeck, his home town and a port in the southwest corner of the Baltic Sea.

Though he was strongly attracted to young men, Mann adhered to social convention, marrying Katja Pringsheim in 1905. Pringsheim, a wealthy Munichborn woman, managed Mann's career and finances and bore him six children. In 1912, Mann published *Death in Venice*, a novella exploring the obsessive love of a middle-aged writer for a young boy. Like his other stories from this period, *Death in Venice* ends tragically, as the protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, falls into the moral and emotional abyss of his own unchecked desires. The inner turmoil of von Aschenbach mirrored the political turmoil of Europe at this time, which was consumed with the Ottoman Empire's desperate attempts to retain power. Mann supported Kaiser Wilhelm's policies and urged other German intellectuals to do the same, claiming that liberalism was contributing to the increasing decadence in Germany and Europe. Mann's political views are on display in his 1924 novel, *The Magic Mountain*, which explores the conflicts between liberal and conservative values. With the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, Mann fled to Switzerland in 1933, and in 1938 moved to the United States, where he was named an honorary faculty member at Princeton University. That same year the German government revoked his citizenship and denounced Mann for his political activism.

Mann's numerous books include the four-volume *Joseph and His Brothers* (1934-44), *Doctor Faustus* (1947), and *The Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man* (1954). Recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929 and internationally acclaimed for his essays as well as his stories and novels, Mann died in 1955 in Switzerland.

# Plot Summary

## Chapter 1

In the opening chapter of *Death in Venice*, von Aschenbach, physically and emotionally exhausted by his work, takes a walk by a cemetery on the outskirts of Munich and sees a redhaired stranger with a rucksack. The man wears a straw hat and has the "appearance of a foreigner, of a traveler from afar." Seeing the man awakens wanderlust in von Aschenbach, and he determines to leave Munich for a vacation. Von Aschenbach had previously shunned travel, doing so only for his health and not for any passion or desire to visit exotic places. This desire was different, however, representing an urge to get away from his work, the very thing that has consumed him his entire life.

The date of the story is unspecified, but the narrator writes that the opening scene takes place, "On a spring afternoon in 19—, a year that for months glowered threateningly over our continent

. . . ." Mann refers here to the numerous diplomatic crises throughout Europe that would eventually lead to World War I.

*Chapter 2*

In this chapter, the narrator provides an extended character description of von Aschenbach, noting his early success as a writer, his fragile health, and his illustrious family background. All of his ancestors "had been officers, judges, and government functionaries . . . devoted to the service of king and country." Von Aschenbach's devotion to his art is a way to control the destructive, darker emotional impulses that can easily overwhelm one's appetites. Von Aschenbach's disciplined nature, his adherence to will and rationality, and the life of the mind, is symbolic of middle-class Europe's repression and fear of the body's desires.

## Chapter 3

Von Aschenbach leaves for a resort on the Adriatic about two weeks after seeing the traveler in the cemetery in Chapter One, but soon tires of its "provincial flavor" and journeys to Venice. On the boat, he sees a group of young people accompanied by an old fop with dyed hair and rouge in his cheeks, whose appearance disgusts the writer. Arriving in Lido, von Aschenbach is taken to Venice by a disturbed gondolier who disappears once he has dropped off von Aschenbach. At dinner, von Aschenbach first sees Tadzio and his family, and is overcome by Tadzio's beauty, noting how the boy reminds him of a Greek sculpture, and of Eros, the Greek god of love. After contemplating his own aging face, von Aschenbach walks through the city and falls sick. He determines to leave the city for Trieste, but after his luggage is mistakenly shipped to a different destination he decides to stay and wait for it to return. He recognizes his joy in having to stay, for it means he can be around Tadzio.

Mann's story is rife with symbolism. The black gondola carrying von Aschenbach to Venice is coffinlike, and its ominous gondolier evokes the traveler from the cemetery and suggests the mythical Charon, who ferried Greek heroes such as Hercules and Odysseus to the Underworld across the River Styx. Venice, like Italy and southern Europe, symbolizes the passionate and the sensuous, in contrast to the orderly and disciplined Germany, a northern European country.

## Chapter 4

Von Aschenbach decides to stay in Venice, even though his luggage has returned. He spends his days watching Tadzio and reflecting on his beauty and the similarity between his own love for the boy and Socrates's love for Phaedrus. Von Aschenbach believes that both he and Socrates see in beauty a path to the spiritual. Tadzio inspires von Aschenbach to write, and using the boy's body as a model the writer pens an essay that he believes "would soon amaze many a reader with its purity, nobility, and surging depth of feeling." The next morning, von Aschenbach follows Tadzio to the sea determined to strike up a casual conversation, but is overcome with fear and walks past him. Obsessed with the boy, von Aschenbach falls deeper into a kind of dream world, in which he sees daily events such as the sunrise in terms of Greek mythological figures such as Eos, goddess of dawn, and her brother Helios, god of the sun. Tadzio himself reminds von Aschenbach of Hyacinthus, a beautiful Spartan boy loved by Apollo.

After Tadzio smiles at von Aschenbach while the latter is reading on the terrace, the writer becomes enraptured with the boy, comparing the smile to that of Narcissus, a Greek god who spurned the advances of the nymph Echo, who subsequently died of grief. The gods punished Narcissus by having him fall in love with his own reflection in the river and drown. Von Aschenbach flees the terrace and retreats to the rear of the hotel park whispering to himself: "You must not smile so! Listen, no one is allowed to smile that way at anyone!" The chapter ends with von Aschenbach whispering, "I love you!" As von Aschenbach's infatuation with Tadzio grows, the distance between narrator and von Aschenbach also grows. Whereas the two were previously intertwined, they are now more easily distinguished.

## Chapter 5

Cholera grips Venice and the number of tourists declines. Von Aschenbach stalks Tadzio's family through Venice's labyrinthine streets, convincing himself of the dignity of his feelings, and that his pursuit of Tadzio is noble. One night, while watching musicians perform at the hotel, von Aschenbach sees Tadzio nearby, and notes, "He is sickly; he will probably not live long." The following day, a British travel agent confirms that Asiatic cholera is spreading through the city, and warns von Aschenbach to leave, as a quarantine will be instituted soon. Because Venice's economy is based on tourism, however, no one has told travelers the truth or the severity of the situation. Crime, public drunkenness, and all forms of vice skyrocket in this crisis atmosphere. Von Aschenbach consoles himself with the thought that if the epidemic leads to a quarantine, he would be

quarantined with Tadzio. That night he dreams of an orgiastic ritual in which animal-skin clad people dance madly while worshipping a huge wooden phallus. "His soul tasted the lewdness and frenzy of surrender."

The city gradually empties of remaining tourists, and von Aschenbach feels relieved because he no longer has to disguise his passion for Tadzio. He begins dressing extravagantly, wearing jewelry, makeup, and perfume, and dyeing his hair. He now resembles the traveler in the first chapter and the foppish man he despised in the third. Von Aschenbach also develops fever after eating infected strawberries. When he discovers that Tadzio's family is leaving after lunch, he walks to the beach to watch Tadzio play with his friends one more time. After wrestling with his friend, Yashu, who had pushed his face in the sand, Tadzio stands up and walks into the water, rebuffing any attempts of an apology. He looks back at the shore after reaching a sandbar and makes eye contact with von Aschenbach, who imagines the boy is beckoning him. This is von Aschenbach's last thought as he slumps in his chair and dies.

# Part 1

## Part 1 Summary

*Death in Venice* is the story of author Gustave Aschenbach's Venice holiday, where he encounters an ethereal boy named Tadzio who will transform the waning days of his life and act as a companion in Aschenbach's transition into death.

As the story begins, Aschenbach, known now as von Aschenbach, sets out on a walk to enjoy the spring weather in hopes of being invigorated to continue writing later in the evening. Aschenbach suffers from a feeling of ennui and cannot keep in check what the ancient author Cicero calls *motus animi continuus,* or constant motion of the soul. Aschenbach's restlessness is exacerbated by his inability to sleep and the pervading tensions of the possibility of war in Europe.

Aschenbach's intentions to take a lengthy walk find him wandering past a mortuary chapel inscribed with religious sayings. As Aschenbach ponders the weight of the words engraved in the stone, he sees a man out of the corner of his eye. Aschenbach notices that the man has a pale complexion and reddish hair, marking him as not being Bavarian. The man wears a straw hat, carries a pack on his back, and seems thin with a prominent Adam's apple protruding from his long neck.

Suddenly aware that the man is staring back at him, Aschenbach moves on but is overcome with the urge to travel. Normally relegating travel to journeys of necessity, Aschenbach imagines all sorts of exotic scenarios in wildernesses and jungles where tigers hide in bamboo thickets.

Aschenbach pulls himself out of this reverie and focuses again on his work, musing that he may not live long enough to complete everything he hopes to. Lately Aschenbach has lost interest in the work and routines of his summerhouse, where he normally has found contentment.

On his way home on the tram, Aschenbach decides that a vacation will do his soul good. He decides to take a holiday, not going as far as where the tigers live, but far enough for a change of scenery. Out of the corner of his eye, Aschenbach looks for the strange man he encountered at the mortuary, but the man never reappears.

## Part 1 Analysis

The author introduces foreshadowing immediately in the story with the mention of the threat of war. The year is not identified, but the assumption is that the story takes place just prior to World War II. That Aschenbach would welcome relief from his current state of restlessness is symbolized by his attempt to enjoy the spring weather during a long walk. More foreshadowing haunts Aschenbach with the appearance of the mortuary and its religious inscriptions.

The author uses the pale stranger to symbolize death in that the man looks nothing like a Bavarian, a look that would have been familiar to Aschenbach. Aschenbach's dreams of travel are powerful symbols that suggest struggle and confusion as represented by the crouching tigers in the thicket of bamboo. What should be the pleasurable activity of planning a holiday is just another exercise in darkness for the restless Aschenbach.

# Part 2

## Part 2 Summary

Aschenbach was born in the province of Selesia to a father who was a prominent official and a mother who was an artist. This combination of officialdom and passion combined to created Aschenbach's personality. An only child, Aschenbach led a solitary life and was schooled at home, which led to further isolation. The sense of discipline instilled in him as a child remains with Aschenbach, and he prides himself on his ability to persevere in spite of tribulations.

Aschenbach receives much professional attention and many tributes throughout his life, but he adopts a cloak of regal bearing to hide the loneliness and sense of futility that pervade his soul. Eventually Aschenbach marries and settles in Munich. The death of his wife soon after plunges Aschenbach into an even deeper melancholy. Aschenbach's daughter is now married herself, and he regrets not having a son.

Aschenbach immerses himself in his work, which celebrates the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. This work also receives recognition, yet Aschenbach finds less and less gratification from his achievements.

Aschenbach is dark and smooth shaven and below average height, with thinning gray hair and eyes that show the strain of seeing too much despair. As an artist, Aschenbach experiences every life situation with heightened senses, and the mental exhaustion clearly is now taking its toll on the man's outward appearance.

## Part 2 Analysis

This section delves deeper into Aschenbach's personality to provide background for his motivations. The combination of a structured father and an impulsive mother provide Aschenbach with a discipline for artistic pursuits, which drive him to enjoy little else. The brief mention of a marriage and a daughter implies that any sort of personal life he attained was to uphold societal pressures, not necessarily for him to enjoy.

This background information is necessary to understand that Aschenbach's current mental duress is not a passing phase but a state of mind that has plagued him all his life. The holiday he yearns for is a metaphor for a release from his own existence.

# Part 3

## Part 3 Summary

It is two weeks before Aschenbach can begin his holiday, and he finally arrives at the island of Pola in the Adriatic Sea. The location does not fulfill Aschenbach's needs, so he revises his travel plans for Venice, the ultimate destination for anyone looking for a fabulous location. Passage is arranged on a decrepit ship manned by a hunchbacked sailor and an old man with a beard like a goat's.

The other passengers on the ship appear to be a group of young people with the exception of one gaudily dressed old man trying to appear as if he is one of the group. Aschenbach occupies himself with a book until he falls asleep, and the journey to Venice is complete.

Aschenbach boards a waiting gondola and settles in to enjoy the scenery until it becomes clear that the boat is headed in the wrong direction. The gondolier blatantly ignores Aschenbach's orders to turn the gondola around, as Aschenbach has no intention of paying extra for a trip that is clearly not in the direction of his destination. When Aschenbach asks the gondolier how much the fare will be, the reply is that the signore will pay.

Finally the gondola arrives at the pier, and Aschenbach disembarks and enters a nearby shop to obtain some coins to pay the gondolier. When Aschenbach returns, the gondolier is gone.

After settling into a pleasant hotel room and spending a short time in reverie about the sea, Aschenbach heads to the hotel lobby to wait for dinner with many of the other hotel guests. Aschenbach's attention is riveted by a Polish family with many severe looking girls and one incredibly beautiful boy of about fourteen. Aschenbach is impressed by the entire family's dignified conduct, but he cannot take his eyes off this beautiful boy.

The weather continues to be as gloomy as it was the day of Aschenbach's arrival, but he tries to make the best of his holiday by sitting on the beach and tending to his correspondence. Soon Aschenbach's attention is diverted by the arrival of the beautiful boy, who is wading at the water's edge. As the boy plays with other boys of his age, Aschenbach hears a name called out repeatedly and determines that the boy's name is Tadzio.

Later that afternoon, the boys crowd into the same elevator where Aschenbach is waiting, and for the first time Aschenbach sees Tadzio up close. The boy's perfect features and glorious blond hair contrast with the jagged and bluish condition of his teeth. This leads Aschenbach to believe that Tadzio is ill and will not live long, a thought that gives Aschenbach an odd sense of pleasure.

Aschenbach decides to take a steamboat across a lagoon to see the Cathedral of San Marco, but the pungent smell in the streets fills Aschenbach with an overwhelming rush to leave Venice. The weather has been inclement, and now this assault on his senses propels Aschenbach back to the hotel to make preparations to depart the next morning.

Always restless the night before travel, Aschenbach does not sleep well and the sight of Tadzio at breakfast tears at Aschenbach's heart. Determined to carry through with the new travel plans, Aschenbach arrives at the pier for departure only to find that his trunk has been sent to another destination. Aschenbach does not know how to respond because he knows he should be irritated. He is secretly pleased, however, that he will be forced to remain in Venice to await the return of his trunk.

As Aschenbach moves closer to the city, he sees Tadzio at a distance and the boy makes an upraised welcoming gesture with his arms. Aschenbach now knows why he is staying in Venice.

## Part 3 Analysis

The author uses many symbols of death in this section, beginning with Aschenbach's dissatisfaction with his first destination. His trip to Venice symbolizes the artist's internal death wish, which is leading him to his destination. The haggard old men on the ship represent death in the common symbol of the boat master who rows dead souls across the river Styx in Greek mythology. Even the old man dressed in the gaudy clothes amid the young people represents death in that no matter what the disguise, death is always present, even where least expected.

The gondolier may be the most blatant death figure, as he is oblivious to Aschenbach's pleas to turn around and his gruff demeanor demurs Aschenbach, a rare occurrence. There is the element of foreshadowing too when the reply to Aschenbach's question about the cost of the trip is that the signore will pay, a statement whose meaning will become evident later in the story.

The author describes the gondola as a coffin with a narrow sleek shape, black shiny paint, and a comfortable seat cushion. Aschenbach settles in and feels the most contentment he has ever felt, which foreshadows his imminent death and release from his internal struggle.

# Part 4

## Part 4 Summary

Aschenbach's decision to remain in Venice fills him with joy in that he may now immerse himself in watching Tadzio. Aschenbach's days are filled with watching Tadzio at the beach and other sights in Venice where their paths cross. At night, Aschenbach sleeps fitfully but happily, eager to awaken and possibly see Tadzio.

The thought that this obsession with the boy may be inappropriate briefly occurs to Aschenbach, but he pushes it away as the artist pushes away every ugly thing. Aschenbach's previously defined date of departure passes, and Aschenbach has more money sent to him and plans to stay indefinitely to be in Tadzio's presence.

It occurs to Aschenbach one day that Tadzio may share his infatuation. Never having spoken, the man and the boy share glances and an unspoken comfort in the other's presence. Perhaps Aschenbach does not want to speak so that this delicious spell will not be broken.

The opportunity to speak presents itself one morning as Aschenbach finds Tadzio walking slowly ahead of him, almost as if the boy wants Aschenbach to strike up a conversation. In his excitement at Tadzio's nearness, Aschenbach speeds up but changes his mind for fear that he might look foolish in approaching the boy.

The mysterious relationship continues in its romantic state until one day when Tadzio does not show up for dinner and Aschenbach worries about the boy's whereabouts. The Polish family suddenly appears, having eaten dinner in a restaurant instead of the hotel. Tadzio spots Aschenbach and smiles at the man for the first time. Later, Aschenbach recalls the brief encounter and whispers to himself as if to Tadzio, "I love you."

## Part 4 Analysis

Aschenbach's comparison of Tadzio to Eros, the Greek god of love, is symbolic in that Tadzio is as beautiful as a god and the boy has brought a love for life to the aging Aschenbach, whose senses have become dulled to beauty. Aschenbach wants to embrace Tadzio just as he yearns to embrace life again, but he knows that the timing and the circumstance are prohibitive. Tadzio represents Aschenbach's last chance to be close to something so beautiful, and the author's portrayal of their silent relationship is hauntingly poignant.

Aschenbach does not want to break the spell of the silence between him and Tadzio because instinctively he knows that the beauty in his life will be gone forever. The relationship is characteristic of Aschenbach's entire life in that he appreciates beauty but can never fully possess it or understand how to get close to it.

# Part 5

## Part 5 Summary

The odor that Aschenbach noticed a few weeks ago has become stronger and more prevalent. Despite many attempts to determine its source, Aschenbach is told only that the city disinfects during hot and humid times of the year. Finally Aschenbach finds a German newspaper that reports a plague in Venice, a fact that another vendor confirms. Aschenbach is torn between fleeing immediately and staying close to Tadzio.

The nearness of death does not deter Aschenbach, who remains in Venice to be close to Tadzio. The old man's attentions have become obvious now, and Tadzio's mother and governess keep a watchful eye on Aschenbach. Nevertheless, Aschenbach intensifies his stalking of Tadzio, almost enjoying the element of risk.

During an evening performance of a musical group, Aschenbach and Tadzio exchange meaningful glances, marking their mutual recognition that the plague is overtaking Venice and the musicians are merely for distraction. Aschenbach notices Tadzio's labored breathing and notes once more that the boy will not live long.

Aschenbach's sleep is again troubled, and now he dreams of a hedonistic adventure back home in Germany where men and women mingle with animals as they dance and drink each other's blood. In the dream, Aschenbach stands back in horror but eventually joins in the dark activities.

Upon awakening, Aschenbach is disgusted by his body, which has been ravaged by time. He finds a barbershop where the proprietor restores Aschenbach to his youthful appearance. Now Aschenbach is unrecognizable to anyone but Tadzio, who senses that this newly transformed young man is his admirer.

The summer winds down, and the foreign guests begin to leave until the hotel is almost empty. The beach is practically deserted except for Tadzio and a few of his friends. One of the boys wrestles Tadzio to the ground and pushes Tadzio's face into the sand. The bully will not relent, prompting Aschenbach to make a move to rescue Tadzio. This causes the other boy to releases Tadzio.

Tadzio will not accept an apology from the bully and walks to the water's edge. As Aschenbach watches Tadzio, it seems as if the boy is beckoning the old man to come closer to the sea. Instinctively, Aschenbach rises but collapses into his chair and dies.

## Part 5 Analysis

The author uses one more important symbol for death in the form of the musician who has the same physical characteristics as the stranger Aschenbach encounters at the

mortuary at the beginning of the story. Although the musician performs for the group, only Aschenbach and Tadzio understand the man's real purpose.

Almost as if he knows his death is imminent, Aschenbach searches in vain through newspapers in hopes that the rumors of the plague are not true. In an even more desperate attempt, Aschenbach frequents a barber who restores Aschenbach's youthful appearance to hold death at bay just a while longer.

Aschenbach's death is imminent, and his dream of revelry and the assumption of humans into other forms symbolize the preparation for entry into another life form. Soon nothing will be familiar to Aschenbach, and this dream is his soul's method of preparation. The story ends on a poignant note with Tadzio beckoning to Aschenbach, and it becomes clear that the boy is also near death. While sad, it is also hopeful in that Tadzio and Aschenbach may be able to express their mutual affection in a place where there are no restrictions, only beauty.

# Characters

## Cemetery Traveler

Von Aschenbach sees the traveler in the cemetery at the beginning of the story. He is carrying a rucksack and a walking stick, and wearing a yellow suit with a straw hat. To von Aschenbach, he looks like a foreigner. "His posture conveyed an impression of imperious surveillance, fortitude, even wildness." Like the gondolier and the old fop, the traveler displays his teeth "menacingly." The traveler makes hostile eye contact with von Aschenbach, but von Aschenbach turns away. However, the sight of the stranger induces the writer to reflect on his youth and dream of traveling to exotic places; von Aschenbach resolves to go on a vacation. When von Aschenbach snaps out of his reverie and heads for the train, he discovers that the traveler has disappeared.

## Gondolier

The gondolier who takes von Aschenbach from Lido to Venice resembles both the traveler in the cemetery and the foppish old man from the boat. He has a "brutal appearance," wearing brightly colored clothes and a straw hat "tilted rakishly on his head." He has blonde hair, a moustache, and an upturned nose, and at first ignores von Aschenbach when the writer asks to be taken to San Marco. When von Aschenbach asks him what he charges, the gondolier replies mysteriously, "You will pay." After dropping von Aschenbach off at the dock, he disappears, and von Aschenbach learns from officials that the gondolier is unlicensed and "a bad man." The gondolier represents Charon, who ferries the dead to the Underworld across the River Styx.

## Old Fop

Von Aschenbach first sees the foppish old man on the steamer to Italy. He is traveling with a group of young clerks from Pola and dressed in a panama hat and a yellow summer suit with a red tie. Von Aschenbach is repelled by the man's attempt to look young. His rouged cheeks, dyed hair, loud clothes, false teeth, and exaggerated behavior disgust him. As von Aschenbach disembarks, the "ghastly old imposter" drunkenly and lasciviously addresses him, and as he does his upper set of teeth falls out. The old fop is linked by appearance to the traveler in the cemetery, the gondolier, the street performer, and von Aschenbach himself at the end of the story.

## Street Performer

The street performer appears in the last chapter during the onset of Asiatic cholera, and carries the smell of carbolic acid authorities are using to disinfect the city. He stands apart from the other performers in his band and has similar features as the traveler in the cemetery, the gondolier, and the old fop. He has a large Adams apple, a snub nose,

red hair, and moves his tongue suggestively around his lips. Like the other three figures, he is out of place. "He seemed not to be of Venetian stock, more likely a member of the race of Neapolitan comics, half pimp, half actor, brutal and daring, dangerous and entertaining." He assures von Aschenbach there is no disease in the city, just the normal health hazards that come with the sirocco. The singer symbolizes decadence and death, and portends von Aschenbach's fate.

## Tadzio

Tadzio is a fourteen-year-old Polish boy on vacation at the same hotel as von Aschenbach. His curly blonde hair, slight body, pale skin, and aquiline features remind von Aschenbach of "Greek statues from the noblest period of antiquity." At various points, von Aschenbach compares the boy to Narcissus, Hyacinthus, and Phaedrus. He is also a sickly youth and headed for an early death. Tadzio is aware of von Aschenbach but never communicates with him. On the boy's last day in the city, he plays with his friend, Yashu, on the beach, and then wades out into the sea after their playing turns rough. Von Aschenbach's last sight before he dies is of the boy looking towards him from a sandbar. The author interprets the look as Tadzio beckoning him towards him.

## Tadzio's Sisters

Tadzio's sisters range from fifteen to seventeen years old, and von Aschenbach infers from their plain appearance and dull expressions that they were raised differently than Tadzio. The sisters represent the qualities that von Aschenbach prized during his life, but the sisters do not appeal to him, aesthetically or sexually.

## Gustav von Aschenbach

Von Aschenbach is a widowed, middleaged, internationally celebrated German writer who has dedicated his life to his art and to the pursuit of artistic beauty. The son of a career civil servant and part of a family of judges and government officials, von Aschenbach wins fame with his writing early in his life. He strives, under pressure, to meet the expectations of a public that counts on him to produce work of intellectual brilliance. Von Aschenbach takes pride in his disciplined lifestyle and austere work habits, but is exhausted at the story's opening and in need of inspiration.

His trip to Venice is the first excursion he has taken in years. When he first sees Tadzio, he tells himself his response to the boy's beauty is purely aesthetic, but as the story progresses, von Aschenbach's feelings become obviously sexual. As his obsession with the boy grows, von Aschenbach throws away all of the dignity and discipline he has cultivated throughout his life. He succumbs to his desires, dressing like the old fop from whom he earlier turned away in disgust, debasing himself, and staying in Venice to be around Tadzio even though he knows deadly cholera is sweeping through the city. Von Aschenbach represents the willful and rational northern European who has repressed his deeper, instinctual nature only to see it return with a vengeance later in life.

Symbolizing the decline of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as embodying the consequences of living a sexually repressed life, von Aschenbach remains one of Mann's most fully realized characters.

## Yashu

Yashu is Tadzio's close friend and companion who plays with him on the beach in Venice. With dark black hair and a husky build, Yashu is a bigger and more masculine boy than Tadzio and appears to idolize his friend.

# Themes

## Art and Society

The idea of the artist as a hero with a noble calling to pursue beauty has a rich tradition in western literature, especially romantic and modern literature. Mann describes von Aschenbach as an artist who has sacrificed his emotional life and distanced himself from the sensuous world to create beauty with his stories. In the second chapter, the narrator says of von Aschenbach, "Even as a young man . . . he had considered perfectionism the basis and most intimate essence of his talent, and for its sake he had cooled his emotions." As a writer consumed by ideas and a moral obligation to pursue beauty at all costs, even his physical health, von Aschenbach likens himself to heroic figures such as Socrates and St. Sebastian, an early Christian martyr, both of whom lived their lives in pursuit of a higher good. A critic in Mann's novella claims that the kind of hero von Aschenbach favored in his stories was based on the idea of "an intellectual and youthful manliness which grits its teeth in proud modesty and calmly endures the swords and spears as they pass through its body." Von Aschenbach was proud of this description, and felt it accurately portrayed his work. Mann shows what happens when von Aschenbach loses control over his passions and can no longer distinguish between art and life.

## Sexuality

*Death in Venice* has become a central text in the canon of gay literature, even though the novella depicts no sexual acts and never explicitly mentions homosexuality. However, von Aschenbach's love for Tadzio, which he tells himself is based on the young boy's beauty, is quite obviously sexual as well, and the passion he feels for the boy is evident in his physical responses to the sight of the boy. Mann develops the theme of same sex love primarily through his use of Greek mythology, particularly when he makes comparisons between von Aschenbach's love for Tadzio with Socrates's love for Phaedrus and Apollo's for Hyacinthus. Ancient Greek culture was well known for its homosexual relationships, especially older Greek men's love for boys. *Death in Venice* is not, however, a cautionary tale about the dangers of homosexual love. Rather, Mann uses the relationship to point out the danger of letting emotions override reason and to underscore the relationship between desire and death.

## Death

In *Death in Venice*, Mann shows how the pursuit of erotic beauty, at the expense of reason and restraint, can lead to degradation and death. Before his trip to Venice, von Aschenbach clearly embodies reason and the pursuit of an austere artistic beauty in his writing. Once in Venice, however, he encounters Tadzio who, for the writer, clearly embodies erotic beauty and sexual possibility, something the writer has denied himself

throughout his life. Von Aschenbach's obsession with the boy causes him to rationalize or ignore behaviors that previously would have been repugnant to him. He begins wearing jewelry, dyes his hair, and dons flamboyant clothes in an effort to attract Tadzio's attention. And by remaining in Venice when he knows of the cholera epidemic, von Aschenbach risks death. Mann also underscores the relationship between erotic beauty and death by packing his story with symbolic imagery such as von Aschenbach's jungle dream of primitive people worshipping a huge phallus in a Bacchean orgy, and by setting the story in Venice, a sensuous, yet decaying city, as corrupt and dangerous as it is beautiful.

# Style

## Mythology

Myths are anonymous and traditional stories that cultures tell to explain natural phenomena. Mann makes broad use of Greek mythology to structure his story and to emphasize the timelessness of his tale. At various points von Aschenbach compares Tadzio with Cupid, Hyacinthus, Narcissus, and Phaedrus, all Greek characters and gods. He describes the sunrise in terms of Greek mythology, and laces his story with references to figures such as Kleitos, Kephalos, Semele, Zeus, Orion, and others. Episodes such as when von Aschenbach rides in the coffin-like gondola with an unlicensed gondolier are used to evoke motifs in Greek literature such as heroes' journey to the Underworld on Charon's boat across the River Styx. Such allusions help to characterize von Aschenbach as a learned man of refined sensibilities and to link von Aschenbach's fate with that of mythological characters.

By liberally dosing his story with implicit and explicit allusions to Greek mythology, and by incorporating Platonic dialogues into a realistic story, Mann highlights von Aschenbach's love of classicism and antiquity. Such references also make the story, for a 1912 readership, more palatable, as they lessen the impact of Mann's exploration of same sex, inter-generational erotic love.

## Symbolism

Symbols are images or actions that stand in for something else. Mann packs his story with symbols to imbue details and characters with deeper meaning and to create a modern myth out of von Aschenbach's tragic decline. The image of the cemetery at the start of the novel, for example, foreshadows von Aschenbach's own death, and the appearance of the foppish drunken man on the boat to Venice symbolizes the very kind of person von Aschenbach will become after he abandons his moral and aesthetic ideals. Venice itself, perhaps, is the most significant symbol in the story.

Setting refers to the time period, the place, and the culture in which a story takes place. Mann chose Venice as his setting because of its rich tradition as a European cultural center, and because of its symbolic significance. Like von Aschenbach, Venice, a once venerable old European city, is in decline. Although on the surface it is a sensuous, cosmopolitan city that people still visit in droves, it is also rotting from within, slowly sinking into the swamp on which it is built, and has lost much of its allure and become primarily a tourist destination. Public officials and merchants are corrupt, conspiring to hide the news of the cholera sweeping the city from visitors, and almost all Venetians that appear in the story are disingenuous, desiring only to extract money from von Aschenbach and other visitors. The cholera infecting the city represents the decadence into which not only Venice has fallen, but von Aschenbach himself and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, much of Europe. Mann traveled to Venice extensively during

his life, saying that it reminded him of his hometown, Lubeck. He also set his 1896 story, "Disillusionment," in Venice.

Although Venice is the primary external setting for most of the story, Mann sets a good deal of the story in von Aschenbach's mind as well. The description of the city and of Tadzio and other characters are all filtered through von Aschenbach's perceptions, and serves to chronicle the deterioration of his mental and emotional health.

# Historical Context

A number of events occurred in 1911 inspiring Mann to begin work on *Death in Venice*. One of these was the death of Czech-Austrian composer Gustav Mahler on May 18, 1911, a brooding modernist who made his living as a conductor. Mahler's fierce and uncompromising dedication to his art, and demand for perfection from his musicians, appealed to Mann, who had met him a few years before his death. Mann not only gives von Aschenbach Mahler's first name, but he also models his hero's physical description on the composer. Mann was no stranger to Venice either. In fact, he was vacationing there when Mahler died, and followed reports of the composer's last days in the local papers.

In addition to the shock of Mahler's death, Mann was influenced by the deterioration of the political situation in Europe at this time. In 1911, Germany sent its battleship, *The Panther*, into the southern Moroccan port of Agadir after France occupied the country during a prolonged bout of tribal unrest. France, Britain (France's ally), and Germany geared up for war as negotiations dragged on. Germany eventually accepted more than 100,000 square miles of the Congo in exchange for relinquishing any claims to Morocco, but Kaiser Wilhelm continued to fan the flames of war, declaring that European countries were conspiring against Germany. In 1912, the Balkan states were also in crisis. Shelving their differences temporarily, these countries united against the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria signed a treaty with both Serbia and Greece, and shortly after with Montenegro, forming the Balkan League. They were responding to the Turks' forced "Ottomanization" of parts of their countries. In October, Montenegro attacked the Turks in Macedonia, defeating them, and in a short time Balkan troops had ousted almost all Ottoman forces from Europe. As a result of the war, Albania gained independence. However, Bulgaria remained dissatisfied with how the spoils were divided and in June they launched an attack on their own allies. Europe was bracing itself for the inevitable outbreak of world war.

The political deterioration of Europe during this time was matched by an increasing cultural decadence and moral decline, a theme Mann explores, and one that was popular in literature during the turn of the century. A chief influence on the decadence movement in literature was Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose erotic poetry, written during the 1870s and 1880s, paved the way for writers to be more frank in writing about sexuality. Oscar Wilde, a gay Irishman, is perhaps best known among those exploring themes of sexuality, decadence, and aestheticism at the end of the nineteenth century. His novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), examines ageing, homoeroticism, and the role of art and the artist in society, all themes in Mann's novella as well. Responding to the notion that art should have a moral purpose, figures such as Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Ernest Dawson underscored their belief in art for art's sake in their novels, poems, plays, and essays. It is important to note that Mann's novella, rather than participating in the decadence movement, was a response to it.

Mann, like many artists during this time, was especially influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud's theories on infantile sexuality and the unconscious had a

profound effect on writers,providing them with new material and ways of thinking about character development and human behavior. In 1900, Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, followed in 1901 by *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and in 1905 by *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. As Mann illustrates in his story about von Aschenbach and Tadzio, the sexual instinct provides humanity with its drive and creative force, but can also be a destructive force if not channeled.

# Critical Overview

*Death in Venice* has occasioned numerous essays by critics exploring its thematic and stylistic richness, and is even more popular today than it was in 1912 when it was published. In "Myth Plus Psychology," an essay appearing in *Germanic Review*, André von Gronicka examines the structural "ingredients" of Mann's formula for his novella. In detailing how myth and psychology inform the work, von Gronicka expands upon conventional definitions of myth, arguing that it "encompasses legend, history, and the literary traditions of the more recent past." This allows him greater freedom to show how mythic elements, apart from Greek stories and characters, operate in the story.

Manfred Dierks also seeks to pin down Mann's use of myth, by making connections between *Death in Venice* and two texts that heavily influenced Mann: Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and Euripides's *The Bacchae*. In his essay, "Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy and Mann's *Death in Venice*," in *Studies of Myth and Psychology in Thomas Mann*, Dierks argues, "Mythological and other classical themes . . . can be grouped according to intensity and breadth of acquisition. This sort of differentiation by degree usually corresponds to their relative value as a textual element." Rita A. Bergenholtz focuses on the question of genre, asking if von Aschenbach indeed is a tragic character, a question that continues to vex critics. In her essay, "Mann's *Death in Venice*," for *The Explicator*, Bergenholtz argues that because the story focuses on von Aschenbach's fall rather than his rise, "Mann presents us with a parody of tragedy, which satirizes the romantic assumptions that enable such an exalted view of humankind." Constance Urdang also considers the story a parody. In her essay, "Faust in Venice: The Artist and the Legend in *Death in Venice*," in *Accent*, Urdang claims the story parodies the Faustian legend. Brendan Lemon is more concerned with the real-life implications of Mann's story and how accurately, or not, it reflects an ageing gay man's sexual desire. Writing for *The Advocate*, Lemon concludes in his essay, "Beached," "What most distinguishes von Aschenbach and his kind . . . may be the fact that sex for them is primarily mental."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

# Critical Essay #1

*Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition and writes on literature and culture for several publications. In this essay, Semansky examines the polarities in Mann's story.*

In *Death in Venice*, Mann exploits polarities for characterization, to underscore his themes, and to drive the plot. These polarities are most easily seen in the setting for the story and in his descriptions of Tadzio, von Aschenbach, and the mysterious men who appear in key scenes. Since his story is structured this way, Mann's descriptions accrue meaning and help to develop the novella's central polarity, the relationship between life and art.

In moving von Aschenbach from the rainy, gray streets of Munich, Germany to the sunny, hot climate of Venice, Italy, Mann symbolizes the differences between temperament and sensibility in northern and southern Europe. Von Aschenbach, a German, epitomizes the austere, hardworking, methodical, and rational Teutonic character, priding himself on his intellect, focus, and self-restraint. Venice, for von Aschenbach, signifies adventure, a place he thought of as "incomparable, someplace as out of the ordinary as a fairy tale." Approaching it from the sea, von Aschenbach describes "that dazzling grouping of fantastic buildings that the republic presented to the awed gaze of approaching mariners; the airy splendor of the palace and the Bridge of Sighs." A city built upon a swamp, with canals for streets, Venice is an international center for the arts and a tourist haven, known for its beaches, warm climate, and sensuous decadence. By describing it from the perspective of the port, Mann utilizes the sea's symbolic link to sex, death, and chaos to show how von Aschenbach is drawn inexorably towards it, and away from the solid footing of land.

The polarity of the two cities is only one of many Mann uses to highlight the battle raging in von Aschenbach's mind and body. This battle, part of what Mann presents as a universal one, entails the conflict between the emotions and the intellect or, more specifically, in the mythic terms that implicitly frame the story, between Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Apollo and Dionysus are Greek gods, the former god of the sun, the latter, god of wine. In his study, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche uses these terms "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" to symbolize principles of classical Greek culture. The Apollonian principle corresponds to ideas of form, individuation, and rational thought, whereas the Dionysian principle suggests the opposite, corresponding to drunkenness, ecstasy, and unrestrained emotion. Tragedy, in Nietzsche's view, results from the tension between these two principles. Mann, a student of both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, from whom Nietzsche derived some of his ideas, dramatizes von Aschenbach's tragedy by showing him devolving from a person of refined tastes and discerning judgment into an obsessive and self-deluded would-be pedophile who can no longer control his desires. Von Aschenbach, who initially embodies the Apollonian principle, in the end literally loses himself to the Dionysian principle, surrendering all pretenses towards worshipping Tadzio for his form and giving full rein to the lustful impulses that consume him. Venice and Munich are not the only settings in the story.

Mann also characterizes von Aschenbach by showing what he is thinking. By moving back and forth between von Aschenbach's thoughts and perceptions of the physical world, Mann underscores the writer's growing self-deception, and also emphasizes the growing distance between the narrator and von Aschenbach as von Aschenbach's mania deepens.

The polarity that undergirds the story, of course, is that between the modern world and ancient Greece, with all of its literary figures and mythological characters. Most of the characters in the story have a counterpart in myth. Tadzio, for example, is referred to variously as Hyacinthus, Eros, Narcissus, etc. for qualities he exhibits that resonate with von Aschenbach. Von Aschenbach also participates in these fantasies he has of the boy. For example, after his luggage is misdirected and he decides to stay in Venice he watches Tadzio play on the beach, daydreaming of playing Socrates to Tadzio's Phaedrus. Cribbing from the Platonic dialogues, von Aschenbach-Socrates dreams of saying to the boy, "My dear Phaedrus, beauty alone is both worthy of love and visible at the same time; beauty, mark me well, is the only form of spirit that our senses can both grasp and endure."

The mysterious men—the traveler in the cemetery, the gondolier, the old fop, and the street musician—that von Aschenbach encounters at crucial points in the story also have their counterparts in myth, and serve as a link between antiquity and the modern world. In their lascivious appearance, their foreign [to von Aschenbach] appearance, and the responses they elicit from von Aschenbach, the men symbolize the Dionysian principle, which both attracts and repels von Aschenbach. In his essay, "Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and Mann's *Death in Venice*," Manfred Dierks suggests the men are "corybantes from his [i.e., Dionysus's] swarm." Corybantes are Dionysus's guardians, charged with inspiring terror and frenzy during sacred rites and rituals. They function in Mann's novella to foretell von Aschenbach's descent into mania, and in their foreign appearance, they are linked to the object of von Aschenbach's desire, Tadzio, a Pole. Foreignness itself is a leitmotif in Mann's story, that is, a recurring image or idea helping to structure the composition and draw readers' attention to Mann's themes. By making Tadzio and the men foreign, Mann can make them all the more inscrutable to von Aschenbach, who can then project upon them his own desires. It is noteworthy that von Aschenbach never talks with Tadzio, but when he hears him speak, the boy's voice captivates him:

Von Aschenbach understood not a single word he said, and though it may have been the most ordinary thing in the world it was all a vague harmony to his ear. Thus, foreignness raised the boy's speech to the level of music, a wanton sun poured unstinting splendor over him, and the sublime perspectives of the sea always formed the background and aura that set off his appearance.

The mysterious men, Tadzio and von Aschenbach, and other polarities, Dierks argues, are derived from parts of the tragedy, *The Bacchae*, by the Greek playwright Euripides. The play details Dionysus's anger at King Pentheus of Thebes, who has challenged his divinity by questioning his parentage. The women of Thebes are possessed by Dionysus's power, wearing animal skins, dancing ecstatically, and copulating on Mt.

Cithaeron. Dionysus defeats Pentheus easily, in large part because of the latter's hubris and ambivalent sexual identity, leading him to his death at the hands of the Bacchae (Dionysus's worshippers, led by Pentheus's mother), who literally rip him to shreds. Mann incorporates his own scene of bacchic mania in his novella in two ways. At the macro level, the inhabitants of cholera-infected Venice are beginning to act out their baser instincts as the plague progresses, displaying drunkenness and lewdness.

At the micro level, von Aschenbach, after deciding not to warn Tadzio's family of the plague, experiences an intense dream of such a ritual, in which men, women, and animals swarm together in a frenzy of sex and violence:

With foam on their lips they raved; they stimulated each other with lewd gestures and fondling hands; laughing and wheezing, they pierced each other's flesh with their pointed staves and then licked the bleeding limbs. Now among them, now a part of them, the dreamer belonged to the stranger god.

Mann uses the dream to symbolically mark von Aschenbach's final capitulation to the Dionysian principle. With von Aschenbach's fall, Mann cautions those who would choose the life of unrestrained passion over that of reasoned behavior. As a neoclassicist, Mann was as interested in instructing his readers as he was in entertaining them. Von Aschenbach's tragedy, Mann suggests, is as old as the myths upon which his story is built.

**Source:** Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on *Death in Venice*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

# Critical Essay #2

*In the following essay, Bergenholtz suggests that* Death in Venice *is a parody of tragedy, citing the novel's focus on Aschenbach's "bathetic decline and fall" as evidence.*

Gustave von Aschenbach, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912), is whether or not he is a tragic character. Like numerous critics, Erich Heller argues that he is, and describes the novella as the "tragic story of Aschenbach's disillusion and downfall." In sharp contrast, Martin Travers insists that "it is not on a note of exaltation that Aschenbach is granted his exit, but rather on one of banality. . . . It is not the noble genre of tragedy but that hybrid form of doubtful status, tragicomedy, that provides the medium for his valediction." I would go further and argue that Mann presents us with a parody of tragedy, which satirizes the romantic assumptions that enable such an exalted view of humankind. Consequently, Aschenbach is not a romantic artist-hero but a parody of one. His literary career is described as a "conscious and overweening ascent to honour." However, the novella focuses not on his so-called rise but on his bathetic decline and fall. Indeed, from the outset Aschenbach's supposed pilgrimage of artistic renewal moves relentlessly downward.

Michel Butor notes that the word "pilgrimage" designates, "first of all, the journey to the tomb of a saint, next to the spot of a vision, an oracular site; one carries his question there and expects a response, a curing of the body or soul." In a parodic pilgrimage, however, there is no revitalization of artistic powers or regeneration of body and soul. Indeed, in Mann's novella, Aschenbach's physical decline, evident from the beginning, becomes increasingly apparent as the story progresses. He suffers from a "growing fatigue"; his strength is "sapped." In fact, long before his fatal journey to Venice, Aschenbach's life is "on the wane." By forty, he is "worn down by the strains and stresses of his actual task." Nevertheless, he endures. At fifty-something he is still holding fast—until, of course, he falls in love in Venice.

However, in a satiric narrative such as *Death in Venice*, "falling in love" is not merely a metaphorical expression. As Frank Palmeri explains, "The plot and the rhetoric of narrative satire cohere in accomplishing the same movement of lowering or leveling." Palmeri continues: "The reduction of spiritual to physical in satiric narrative corresponds to the rhetorical reduction of metaphors to literal meanings." This displacement "works to satirize hidebound characters . . . who live within the confines of clichés and received ideas." In a letter to Carl Maria Weber (4 July 1920), Mann explained how the fall motif was originally connected with Aschenbach's story:

Passion as confusion and as a stripping of dignity was really the subject of my tale—what I originally wanted to deal with was not anything homoerotic at all. It was the story—seen grotesquely—of the aged Goethe and that little girl in Marienbad whom he was absolutely determined to marry.

. . . this story with all its terribly comic, shameful, awesomely ridiculous situations, this embarrassing, touching, and grandiose story which I may someday write after all.

Walter Stewart offers this apposite conclusion: "Mann sees the actual fall of Goethe in the presence of a child as the very essence of degradation. . . . That Gustav Aschenbach collapses in exhaustion following his frantic chase after Tadzio must therefore be considered something less than a coincidence."

Writing to Karl Kerenyi (20 February 1934), Mann says, "I am a man of balance. I instinctively lean to the left when the boat threatens to capsize on the right, and vice versa . . . " In sharp contrast to Mann, Aschenbach is an extremist. He is off balance and destined to fall. Thus, instead of reaching a climax, Aschenbach's story continues to wind down, as "(o)ne afternoon he pursue(s) his charmer deep into the stricken city's huddled heart." There he literally "lose(s) his bearings. He did not even know the points of the compass; all his care was not to lose sight of the figure after which his eyes thirsted." Then, when Aschenbach realizes that his mad quest to locate his beloved Tadzio is fruitless, he "(sinks) down on the steps of the well and lean(s) his head against its stone rim." Ironically, the narrator's description of Venice as a "fallen queen" applies to Aschenbach as well. Indeed, our final view of Aschenbach emphasizes this fallen state: Gazing at Tadzio from his beach chair, Aschenbach's tired head falls upon his chest, and he expires.

Numerous critics have suggested that tragedy is no longer possible in the twentieth century because, in general, we no longer believe in ideas of the heroic and noble. When we can no longer tell straightforward tragic tales, we must turn, as Thomas Mann does in *Death in Venice*, to parody. Mann's predisposition toward the parodic mode is made clear in his essay "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner" (1933):

It is well to understand that the artist, even he inhabiting the most austere regions of art, is not an absolutely serious man . . . and that tragedy and farce can spring from one and the same root. A turn of the lighting changes one into the other; the farce is a hidden tragedy, the tragedy—in the last analysis—a sublime practical joke. The seriousness of the artist—a subject to ponder.

**Source:** Rita A. Bergenholtz "Mann's Death in Venice," in *Explicator*, Vol. 55, Spring, 1997, pp. 145-47.

# Critical Essay #3

*In the following excerpt, Swales posits two levels on which Mann's* Death in Venice *advances critical understanding as virtue—the "metaphorical," and the "realistic, psychological."*

*Der Tod in Venedig (Death in Venice)* (1912) tells the story of how Gustav von Aschenbach, a writer famous for the chiselled perfection of his work and for the values of order and self-discipline which it enshrines, decides to break out of his routine existence in Munich by taking a holiday in Venice. In Venice he becomes increasingly fascinated by a Polish boy, Tadzio, who is staying with his family at the same hotel. Aschenbach persuades himself that his interest in the boy is purely the disinterested one of aesthetic appreciation, but gradually it becomes clear that he has succumbed to a homosexual infatuation. Aschenbach's decline is echoed in disturbing events which occur in Venice: the weather is oppressive, the city smells of carbolic. Aschenbach finally discovers the true state of affairs: there is a cholera epidemic in the city. But he is no more able to leave than he is to warn Tadzio and his family. Not long afterwards he is found dead in his deck chair on the beach.

One of the central problems which *Der Tod in Venedig* poses for the reader is the whole question of motivation and causality in the story. The opening few pages raise the issue with particular clarity. The weary, jaded Aschenbach is standing by a tram stop in Munich. Across the road there is 'das byzantinische Bauwerk' (the byzantine edifice) of a cemetery. In the doorway of this building Aschenbach suddenly notices a tramp, a strange, exotic figure whose long white teeth are bared in a curious grimace. The narrator continues: . . .

Whether the strange man's appearance with its suggestion of wandering and travel had stirred his imagination, or whether some other physical or psychological influence was at work—to his surprise he was aware of a strange opening up of his inner life, a kind of disquiet and restlessness.

The narrator can, it seems, only conjecture as to what is going on. Is it simply the image of a wanderer that fills Aschenbach with thoughts of travel? Or are there other factors at work? A few lines later the narrator puts an end to all speculation with the terse phrase . . .

it was the urge to travel, nothing more.

But this need for a change of scenery quickly assumes fantastic proportions in the protagonist's fevered imagination: he sees a vision of an exotic, sultry jungle, . . .

amongst the knotted trunks of a bamboo thicket he saw the baleful eyes of a crouching tiger gleam.

The vision fades—but the decision to travel remains. As he boards the tram Aschenbach looks around for the tramp but he is nowhere to be seen.

The opening scene swiftly establishes what are to become key motifs and images for the story as a whole. The mysterious tramp will recur in two figures who appear later on: in the unlicensed gondolier and in the street musician who entertains the hotel guests. All three have certain physical features in common: the snub nose and the bared teeth. All three figures suggest an exotic, forbidden realm existing outside the familiar world: particularly the episode with the gondolier makes clear the metaphorical significance of these figures. They represent death (the bared teeth, glimpsed first outside the cemetery, suggest the skull). Does this then mean, we ask ourselves, that we are to take this story on a supernatural level? Do we take the title literally: that it is about Death summoning the ageing artist? It is, of course, a possible reading. But what of the psychological argument—what of that phrase about 'Reiselust nichts weiter'? Perhaps Aschenbach is simply jaded, in need of a change. Perhaps for this reason his subconscious generates the dream of rampant, anarchical living: the jungle. The images of untrammelled life harbour a certain threat—the eyes of the crouching tiger. Aschenbach seems aware of the threat . . .

But, within the symbolism of the story, the tigers do catch up with him. For the clerk at the travel agent in Venice will tell Aschenbach about the movement of cholera epidemics in recent times. And the cholera is born in that . . .

jungle of primeval islands in whose bamboo thickets the tiger crouches.

Is cholera then purely the contingent outward embodiment of an essentially metaphysical process? Aschenbach has repudiated his orderly, contained existence: he seeks experience of anarchic, dionysian fury, and the very intensity of rampant life will overwhelm his weary body and mind. Does the strange God, Dionysus, follow the course of the cholera in order to seek out his destined victim? It is certainly suggested, at the metaphorical level. But there is also the meticulously sustained level of psychological realism to the story. And, accompanying and articulating this level of motivation we have the narrator's stern comments of moral judgement on Aschenbach. Particularly towards the end epithets such as 'der Verwirrte', 'der Betörte', 'der Starrsinnige' abound, epithets which spell out Aschenbach's self-deception, blindness, and obstinacy. And the moral viewpoint is not simply a matter of brief phrases. It culminates in a bitter paragraph that highlights the horror and degradation of Aschenbach's condition . . .

He sat there, the master, the artist made respectable, the author of *The Wretched*, that work which in such exemplary and clear form had renounced any sympathy with bohemianism, with the lurking depths, the abyss, which had reprehended the reprehensible; he who had climbed so high, who had gone beyond all knowledge and irony, who had accommodated himself to the responsibilities that go with fame and public trust, he whose renown was officially recognized, whose name had been ennobled, whose style was taken as a model for schoolboys to follow—he sat there, his eyelids closed: occasionally there was a sidelong glance, scornful and embarrassed,

but then swiftly hidden, and his slack lips their colour heightened by rouge, formed single words . . .

The very rhythm of this sentence with its complex of relative clauses ('er saß dort . . . der Meister . . . der Autor . . . der Hochgestiegene . . . er, dessen Ruhm . . . dessen Name . . . er saß dort') gives a passionate, rhetorical feel to the narrator's disgust as he contrasts Aschenbach, the man of orderliness and control, with the pathetic wreck crumpled against the fountain.

to travel then . . . but not too far, not as far as the tigers.

The story works on two levels. At a metaphorical level it is the tragedy of the creative artist whose destiny it is to be betrayed by the values he has worshipped, to be summoned and destroyed by the vengeful deities of Eros, Dionysus, and Death. At a realistic, psychological level, the story is a sombre moral parable about the physical and moral degradation of an ageing artist who relaxes the iron discipline of his life, who becomes like the pathetic dandy on the boat to Venice, an older man desperately trying to recapture his lost youth. Both these levels of the story—and the kind of reader response which they elicit—co-exist in Thomas Mann's text. One can illustrate this co-existence by examining the function of those passages in the story which draw on a whole tradition of aesthetic philosophy from Plato onwards. I have in mind those paragraphs where we are given discursive reflections about art and beauty, quotations from and allusions to the Platonic dialogues. In one sense, such passages supply a philosophical and metaphysical context for Aschenbach's experience which makes his story illustrative of larger problems. Beauty, so the argument runs, is the one absolute that is perceivable by the senses. When man encounters the Beautiful he is visited almost by a shock recognition that he has come face to face with an intimation of his higher spiritual destiny. Yet Beauty is a subversive value: the very fact that the senses are involved in its perception means that man's excited response may be not spiritual but sensual. The higher love may, on examination, prove to be nothing more than a sexual infatuation. And this is true particularly of homoerotic experience. Because a homosexual attraction cannot lead to physical creation, to procreation, it may promise the higher creativity of the mind, of art. Yet equally the homoerotic can be the source of furtive, degraded and degrading relationships. Such considerations as these figure in the text of *Der Tod in Venedig* in two ways. Clearly they function in their own right as philosophical reflections on the ambiguous nature of Beauty. And this philosophical scheme gives Aschenbach's story the dignity of a metaphysical drama. But equally these reflections are inseparable from the particular psychological context of Aschenbach, the ageing artist. He himself uses such considerations to justify—and, ultimately, to deceive himself about—the nature of his feelings for the boy Tadzio. The metaphysical argument is of a piece with the realistic, psychological argument. The Platonic musings on Beauty are vital ingredients of Aschenbach's psychology: they are *his* thoughts—and yet they are also the thoughts enshrined in a major philosophical tradition of the West.

What, then, is the effect of this coexistence of meanings? T. J. Reed has shown how the story has its roots in what was initially a local problem: Mann disliked the enthusiasm in

contemporary art circles for work that was sensuous, plastic, 'sculptured', rather than reflective, critical, analytical. From this came the impetus to a moral tale about the degradation that awaits the man, the artist who denies scruple and reflection in the name of a cult of formal beauty and perfection. But the ideas and values that are implicated in Aschenbach's decline are, as we have seen, part of a longer cultural and philosophical tradition with which Mann has to take issue if he is to understand the forces that mould and shape his hero's thinking. And any such cultural tradition is not simply a stable, timeless entity: it is transmitted through the specific sensibility of a particular man, of a particular time, of a particular culture and society. The story makes clear that Aschenbach is very much part of the historical ambience around him. The narrator reflects: . . .

In order for a significant product of the human mind to make instantly a broad and profound impact there must be a secret affinity, indeed a congruence between the personal fate of its creator and the general fate of its contemporary audience.

In what does this sympathy consist which makes Aschenbach the spokesman of a generation? The narrator answers: . . .

Once—in an unobtrusive context—Aschenbach had directly suggested that any major achievement that had come about stood as an act of defiance: it had been made in defiance of grief and torment, poverty, destitution, bodily weakness; vice, passion and a thousand other obstacles.

Aschenbach speaks, then, for a generation of 'Moralisten der Leistung' (moralists of effort), a generation which identifies moral good with spiritual struggle and attrition. Virtue is to be found in the 'Trotzdem', in the overcoming of difficulty, scruple, doubt in an exercise of willed self-assertion. This is a Nietzschean legacy, what J. P. Stern has called 'the morality of strenuousness'. The narrator, in a passage of explicit commentary, goes on to imply a critique of the cast of mind that identifies morality with an entity that has, strictly speaking, no room for moral values....

Does form not have two faces? Is it not moral and immoral at one and the same time? Moral as the result and expression of discipline, but immoral and indeed anti-moral in so far as it is of its very nature indifferent to moral values; in fact it is essentially concerned to make morality bow before its proud and limitless sceptre.

Here the narrator comments upon an aspect of Aschenbach's personality as artist, but such is the 'sympathy' that binds this artist to his time that the aesthetic credo implies the cultural and intellectual temper of its age. *Der Tod in Venedig* appears some two years before the outbreak of the First World War. It is a text which suggests how the ethos of discipline and order is a questionable value, one which, in its very repudiation of scruple, reflection, analysis, lays itself open to the seductions of untrammelled, orgiastic experience, thereby confusing self-transcendence with self-abasement. Mann's story acquires a particularly sombre colouring when we remember the waves of collective enthusiasm with which a whole European generation acclaimed the outbreak

of war in 1914. Significantly, in his essay *Bruder Hitler (Brother Hitler)* of 1939 Mann wrote the following: . . .

*Death in Venice* knows a great deal about the repudiation of contemporary psychologism, about a new decisiveness and simplicity in the psyche—all this, admittedly, I brought to a tragic conclusion. I was not devoid of contact with tendencies and ambitions of the time, with what was felt to be—and proved to be—the coming mood: twenty years later it was to be hawked through the streets.

It would, however, be too easy to see *Der Tod in Venedig* as simply a cautionary tale. For it is too perceptive in its understanding of the ethos of form, too implicated in the cast of mind which it diagnoses, to be a work of straightforward didacticism. Indeed, it is one of the profoundest ironies of the book that its own formal control, its deliberately 'classicizing' style is of a piece with the artistic and human ethos which it criticizes. And this gives the work an authority richer than unambiguous denunciation could ever achieve. To borrow the term applied to Aschenbach's achievement, Mann's tale is bound to its time by complex ties of sympathy. And sympathy implies 'suffering with', a 'suffering with' which, in this case, embraces analytical understanding and critique.

**Source:** Martin Swales, "The Vulnerable Artist," in *Thomas Mann: A Study*, Rowman and Littlefield, 1980, pp. 29-45.

# Adaptations

Luchino Visconti's 1971 film adaptation of *Death in Venice* starring Dirk Bogarde and Bjorn Andresen is available at most video stores. In Visconti's film, Aschenbach is a composer instead of a writer.

# Topics for Further Study

Analyze Mann's use of color in describing the traveler in the cemetery, the gondolier, the old fop, and the street musician. Write a short essay interpreting the symbolic significance of color in this work.

Does Mann's novella have a moral? If so, what is it? Back up your response with evidence from the text.

Break up into five groups. Each group should rewrite one chapter, telling von Aschenbach's story from a first person point of view. After reading your chapter to the class, discuss the choices you had to make and how they changed the meaning of the story.

Compare Euripides's play, *The Bacchae*, with Mann's novella and make a list of all similarities you can find between the two works.

Research the history of Venice and its relationship to the arts. Then present your findings to your class.

Are beauty and art as corrupting today as they were in Mann's time? Illustrate your response with specific examples.

Von Aschenbach becomes more aware of his own age the deeper he falls in love with Tadzio. As a class, brainstorm what you fear most about ageing and then discuss your responses. Have social attitudes towards ageing changed since 1911 when Mann wrote the novella? Be specific with your responses.

Write a short essay examining Mann's use of ethnic and sexual stereotypes in the novella.

# Compare and Contrast

**1910-1915:** In 1912, the *Titanic*, a sprawling 892-foot ocean liner and the world's largest ship, sinks off the coast of Newfoundland during its maiden voyage after hitting an iceberg. More than 1,500 people die.

**Today:** James Cameron's film of the disaster, *Titanic* (1997), smashes box office records and is an international blockbuster, winning eleven Academy Awards, including one for Best Picture.

**1910-1915:**In 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, is assassinated in Sarajevo, the capital of the AustroHungarian empire, setting in motion the conflict that would become World War I.

**Today:** After many of it buildings and streets are destroyed and many of its citizens killed during the 1990s war against Serbia, Sarajevo is now being rebuilt.

**1910-1915:** In 1913, D. H. Lawrence publishes *Sons and Lovers*, a novel that literally illustrates Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex and shocks many readers.

**Today:** Graphic sex is a staple feature of the contemporary novel, both literary and popular.

# What Do I Read Next?

In 2001, Gilbert Adair's study, *Inspiration for "Death in Venice"—The Real Tadzio 1900-1962*, was published. Adair examines the life of Wladyslaw Moes, the person on whom Mann based his character Tadzio.

German writer Herman Hesse was a good friend of Mann. His novel *Siddhartha* (1922), the story of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment, reflects Hesse's interest in Indian philosophy and culture.

In *Buddenbrooks*, a semi-autobiographical family saga published in 1901, Mann details the history of the Buddenbrook family and the town in which they lived.

Mann was deeply influenced by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who elaborates on his ideas about Apollonian and Dionysian principles in *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1871.

John Julius Norwich's 600-page-plus 1982 tome, *A History of Venice*, chronicles the history of Venice from the Middle Ages to its capture by Napoleon.

# Further Study

Braverman, Albert, and Larry David Nachman, "The Dialectic of Decadence: An Analysis of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*," in *German Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, November 1970, pp. 289-98.

Braverman and Nachman analyze von Aschenbach's change from an idealist to a sensualist.

Brennan, Joseph Gerard, *Thomas Mann's World*, Russell & Russell, 1962.

Brennan examines how Mann's aesthetic sensibility is reflected in his writing.

Burgen, Hans, and HansOtto Mayer, *Thomas Mann: A Chronicle of His Life*, Translated by Eugene Dobson, University of Alabama Press, 1969.

Burgen and Mayer's book chronicles Mann's life year by year, providing links between his writing and events in his life.

Leppmann, Wolfgang, "Time and Place in *Death in Venice*," in the *German Quarterly*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1, January 1975, pp. 66-75.

Leppmann examines the "timelessness" and "classical" quality of Mann's novella through a discussion of Venice as it was in 1911, the year Mann began writing his story.

Mann, Erika, *The Last Years of Thomas Mann: A Revealing Memoir by His Daughter, Erika Mann*, translated by Richard Graves, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958.

Mann's daughter reminisces about her father's last years.

Ritter, Naomi, ed., *Thomas Mann: "Death in Venice": Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, Bedford Books, 1998.

This collection of essays utilizes a range of critical strategies to interpret Mann's novella. Each essay is prefaced with a history and description of the school of thought to which it belongs.

Luke, David, Introduction, in *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, by Thomas Mann, translated by David Luke, Bantam, 1988, pp. xxxii-xlv.

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*Death in Venice*," in *Studies of Myth and Psychology in Thomas Mann*, Vittorio Klostermann, 1972, pp. 18-37.

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Reed, T. J., *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*, Oxford, 1974, pp. 44-78.

Urdang, Constance, "Faust in Venice: The Artist and the Legend in *Death in Venice*," in *Accent*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Autumn 1958, pp. 253-67.

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BOOKRAGS

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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