

Title: Death In Venice

Author: Thomas Mann

Summary:

After a day of work, Aschenbach heads out for a walk in the Munich area. He's not feeling too well - he was up all night and just wants to get some fresh air. But when he gets to the North Cemetery it's getting dark and stormy, so he takes a tram back to the city. On his way back through the cemetery he sees a man who looks like a kind of proto-Gulliver character from The Piazza del Trabantio . This guy is clearly there to see the sunrise rise over the Bay of Biondello. We learn that this dude is named Gaston Aschendach and he's about fifty years old. It's also revealed that he's got a thing for fashion, makeup, fancy dresses, and being young and beautiful . After seeing the sunrise, Aschbach heads into the city on foot and boards a boat headed for Venice. A gondola picks him up and drops him off at an inn where he gets dropped off at the train station. At the inn he meets several other travelers , all of whom are tourists. They include a group of Polish guys and a bunch of young Polish girls. Then we get a detailed description of the types of clothes these people are wearing. These aren't your everyday trompe l'oeil clothes: they're checked-out clothing. There are European galoshes, dainty frocked with jewels, jewel-studded necklaces, beaded purses, etc. Gasphers, dancers, musicians, waiters, you name it. And guess what? All manner of low-budget entertainment. What do these people wear? Yep, Guidedogic clothing. That's right, ladies and gentleman dressed in checkerboard and fur coats. No frills, no frills--it's total budget conscious spending money. Back to the tour though, and now we get another introduction to the rest of the cast of characters. The first person we meet is a guy named Gustave von Aschenbach. OK, yeah, he's a bit of a poser, but let's cut him some slack since he hasn't been around much as a kid. His last name sounds familiar, doesn't it? Well, okay, it's Aschenburg , which is German for "artist," not "poetry" or "literary." Also fittingly, his last name is The next day, Aschenbach eats a long, tedious meal and ponders philosophical questions while contemplating the harmony that must come to subsist between the individual human being and the universal law in order that human beauty may result. He goes to bed but has vivid dreams. The following morning he feels out of sorts and begins to think of leaving. At nine o'clock he goes down to the breakfast room and sees the two Polish girls with their governess. Phax is not there. After a leisurely breakfast, he visits his sisters at their table and watches as they eat. Then he goes out to the beach and seats himself on a bench by the water. There he observes the young Eunice dressed in a light blue suit with a white collar and a red silk necktie; she has lovely blue eyes and a soft pink rosebud ring on her head. Aschenbrook then goes to the section of the beach reserved for the guests of the hotel. He sees several cabins along the shore and overhears the conversation of a half-grown boy named Tadzio conversing with some other boys and girls. They are from the steam ship Adjou who comes from the south of England. It is obvious that this is the same little boy whom Aschenbrew knows from the beginning of the novel. In fact, it is only the second time we have seen him interact with another person other than Phax. This makes Aschenbrod wonder about the nature of relations between people who know each other only through their outward appearances.

For example, when he sees the mother of the Polish boat driver and her three daughters adorably paddle out to meet him on the water, he recognizes them as "the nymphs and Achelous". But one evening after dinner he hears the nunlike sister of the ship's captain speaking to Jaschiu, Adjju, which means "Beauty," so he decides to write an essay comparing the qualities of the sea and its inhabitants to those of God. Before he can complete his writing, however, he runs into Tadeuszio who invites him to take a walk on the beach. Here again Aschenbeck with his mind wandering back to the theme of art and taste. When he reaches the spot where he had last seen the boy, he finds himself overcome with emotion and rushes away without completing his piece of work. Back at the hotel, he discovers that his luggage has already been taken. During his stay on the Lido, Aschenbach observes that the number of guests is declining and that German is becoming a scarce commodity. He overhears a barber saying that a German family has departed after a brief visit and speculates that the father does not fear the sickness because he has no fear of it. After lunch one day, Aschenbach ferries across to Venice and tries unsuccessfully to find his idol on the Piazzetta. But as he is sitting at tea at a little round table on the shady side of the square, suddenly he notices a peculiar odour, which, it seemed to him now, had been in the air for days without his being aware. It is a sweetish medicinal smell associated with wounds and disease and suspect cleanliness. In the narrow space the stench grew stronger. At the street corners placards were stuck up, in which the city authorities warned the population against the danger of certain infections of the gastric system, prevalent during the heated season; advising them not to eat oysters or other shellfish and not to use the canal waters. Little groups of people stood silently in the squares and on the bridges; the traveller moved among them, watched and listened and thought. These things that were going on in the unclean alleys of Venice, under cover of an officious hushing-up policy gave Aschenbach a dark satisfaction. The city's evil secret mingled with the one in his heart would have staked all his efforts to keep it. One night when returning late from Venice, he pauses by his beloved's chamber door in the second story. A band of street musicians comes to perform in the hotel gardens after dinner. Aschenbach sits near the balustrade and admires the spectacle. He sees Tadzio and his sisters out on the quay taking a gondola and decides to join them. However, he soon loses them and must resort to stalking them over bridges and over public places until he finally meets them in a navel passage whence there was no escape, and yet it would be untrue to say he suffered. Yet it would be worth noting that Aschenbach's footsteps guided by the demonic power whose pastime is to trample on human reason and dignity. On Sundays, the Polish family never appear on the beach but instead Aschenbach pursues them down to the