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The Narcotic Aesthetics Of Desire In Thomas Mann's *Death In Venice*: Psychological Disintegration

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Abstract:

Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) is a comprehensive psychological exploration of aesthetic addiction, depicting beauty not as a noble ideal but as a tempting and deadly power. This study analyses the novella using the concept of aesthetic narcotisation, positing that beauty in Mann's work operates as a psychological narcotic that progressively erodes reason, ethics, and identity. In contrast to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which has Lord Henry as the external agent of corruption through his seductive hedonism, Mann depicts Gustav von Aschenbach as being ensnared by the artistic standards themselves, devoid of any external corrupter. His interaction with the youngster Tadzio initiates a compulsive loop whereby beauty provokes, confounds, and finally subjugates his awareness. This study, utilising Freudian concepts of repression, sublimation, and hallucination, alongside critiques from scholars like Andre Aciman and Camille Paglia, contends that Aschenbach's decline exemplifies the psychological processes of addiction—initial euphoria, escalating dependency, loss of control, and ultimate collapse. With its beautiful atmosphere and underlying ruin, Venice makes his condition worse by making him feel sleepy. In the end, *Death in Venice* shows how dangerous it is to be too strict about how things should look. When beauty turns into a drug instead of a creative drive, it changes from a way to get ideas to a trap that can kill you mentally.

Keywords: loss of control, Corruption, Aesthetic narcotisation, Collapse, Repression

Introduction

Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) is a profoundly insightful modernist novel that explores the psychological deterioration of Gustav von Aschenbach, a renowned writer whose orderly, Apollonian existence unravels due to his obsession with the beauty of a young Polish boy, Tadzio. Critics frequently analyse Mann's novella through themes of decadence, forbidden desire, and the conflict between reason and passion; however, a similarly compelling interpretive framework arises when the text is scrutinised through the lens of aesthetic narcotization—the conversion of beauty into an intoxicating psychological substance.

As Walter Muschg notes that Aschenbach's fixation on Tadzio transforms aesthetic appreciation into addiction as he asserted in these lines: "Beauty becomes for him a narcotic, a force that suspends the self and undermines conscious discipline" (Muschg 112). The above lines asserted by Aschenbach's artistic sense, which was once based on Apollonian discipline, falls apart when he thinks about idealised youth, which is appealing. What starts out as creative thought for him turns into an addiction that weakens his morals, clouds his judgement, and speeds up his slide into crazy desire. In this light, Aschenbach's concern shows how modernists worry about how unstable identity is. It shows that unchecked lust for beauty can beat brains, discipline, and the structures that used to decide who we are as people and same thing we can have in the Wilde's novel. Dorian has a decrease in both his moral and psychological well-being as a direct result of the influence of aestheticism. As far as Dorian is concerned, beauty is not only a characteristic; rather, it is a powerful force that has the potential to cause an individual to give up their sense of reason, self-control, and morality. As soon as he realises that his young look will be preserved, even if the image will show the wounds of his activities, beauty becomes an intoxicating experience for him. Having this realisation frees him from the responsibility of being accountable and motivates him to live an expensive lifestyle. Since this narcotic impact suspends his sense of self in the current moment, he is compelled to seek pleasure without thinking and to remove himself from the implications of his acts. He is also driven to detach himself from the consequences of his actions. Consequently, Dorian's discipline is weakened as a result of the temptation of perpetual beauty, which ultimately leads to his degeneration, moral decline, and identity dissolution. The fact that this is the case demonstrates how a fixation with beauty may destroy the very person whom it aims to improve. As Christopher Craft argues that aestheticism becomes a dangerous ideology in Dorian's life, noting that "Dorian's immersion in aesthetic hedonism dissolves the ethical self, leaving only the craving for sensation" (Craft 114). In contrast to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where Lord Henry's alluring language serves as an external corrupting influence, Mann's novella lacks a singularly corrupting character. Instead, Aschenbach gets entangled in the very aesthetic standards. Beauty turns into a drug that is energising, addicting, and in the end bad for you. The story shows a psychological pattern in which the need for artistic greatness is stronger than moral boundaries, sound thinking, and

staying true to one's identity. In the work, T. J. Reed explains that Mann presents aesthetic longing as a destructive compulsion:

Mann transform aesthetic idealism into a kind of addictions; Aschenbach becomes dependent on the vision of beauty that Tadzio represent, even as it pulls towards psychological collapse. (Reed 94)

T. J. Reed contends that Mann depicts aesthetic desire not as a benign appreciation of beauty, but as a detrimental addiction. Aschenbach becomes addicted to Tadzio because he idealises him. He needs the boy's beauty to feel alive, even if it makes him less stable. Reed asserted that Mann shows that Aschenbach's emotional breakdown is caused by his need for beauty. This shows that aesthetic idealism may be harmful instead than helpful.

The primary focus of this work is that *Death in Venice* illustrates how artistic ambition can be comparable to a substance. Beauty is like a drug for the mind; it makes Aschenbach less self-controlled, less moral, and less sure of what she knows. The fact that Aschenbach had a connection with Tadzio shows how fragile his artistic identity is and how unrealistically high standards for beauty can make the real world seem like a dream. Mann's story is mostly about addiction, but not to a drug. Instead, it's about how Aschenbach's idea of beauty destroys his mind and kills him.

The figure of Tadzio exposes the essential fragility of Aschenbach's identity as an artist. His reputation had rested on an image of strict discipline and intellectual composure, but Tadzio's beauty reveals that this identity is far more fragile than it appeared. Aschenbach's commitment to form and restraint is overwhelmed by a longing that he cannot rationalize, and the standards of beauty he once upheld as artistic ideals begin to dissolve the foundations of his moral and psychological stability. (Kurzke 208–209)

By showing the notion of Aschenbach's controlled creative identity's vulnerability to destruction under the influence of beauty, Hermann Kurzke's observation indicates how *Death in Venice* poses a challenge to the idea that Aschenbach maintained his creative identity. Tadzio is the spark that reveals Aschenbach's fundamental weakness underneath the well-constructed facade of intellectual control and moral discipline that he has constructed for everyone else. Several of the same aesthetic characteristics that used to set Aschenbach apart as an artist are still present today. These characteristics include form, restriction, and idealised beauty. But all of a sudden, these restrictions begin to work against him, causing him to lose the inner calm that he believed would never change. Due to the fact that his feelings for Tadzio are becoming stronger, he is no longer able to depend on the rational framework that has been used to define his job. Instead, he enters a state of hallucination, during which the real world loses its distinctness and significance to him. The fall of Aschenbach is not just a personal failure for Kurzke, but it also marks the end of his whole creative way of looking at the world. Kurzke sees this as a failure on a personal level. This demonstrates how devastating beauty can be when it is seen as an ideal that cannot be surpassed.

Aesthetic Principles as the First Attraction

The austerity, intellectual rigour, and creative discipline that Aschenbach had prior to his arrival in Venice earned him a reputation that was recognised beyond the confines of Venice. Rather than focussing on the depth of his writing, Mann defines him as a writer who has acquired mastery via effort that is so severe that it borders on asceticism than on the depth of his writing. It is one of the most vital components of his creative vision, but it is also one of the most ignored components. Denial of desire is one of the components. Mann adds that the early method that Aschenbach uses in the novella is one in which "the cold, controlled style" conceals "the fire within" (Mann 12). This is the approach that Mann describes. In his explanation of the approach, Mann provides this particular depiction. As it is understood within the framework of Apollonian decorum, the "fire" is a representation of suppressed desire, particularly yearnings for creative and physical expression.

Mann's depiction of Aschenbach's artistry reveals a man who has perfected the ability to conceal passion beneath the surface of intellectual control. His prose, described as 'cold' and meticulously shaped, arises from a lifelong struggle to master and deny the unruly desires that threaten his self-conception as a disciplined artist. Aschenbach's aesthetic principles—his belief in restraint, effort, and moral seriousness—are inseparable from this suppression of desire. (Heilbut 171–172)

Aschenbach is portrayed in *Death in Venice* as an artist whose valued profession is predicated on the continual denial of inner need, according to the interpretation provided by Anthony Heilbut. His vocabulary is "cold" and precisely controlled, which reflects not just a taste for a certain style but also a lifetime effort to restrain desires that he considers to be destructive to his identity as an artist who is serious and conducts himself in an ethically rigorous manner. Within the framework of Aschenbach's all-encompassing creative philosophy, the notion of managing his wants, persevering, retaining clarity, and sustaining moral integrity serves as the foundation. Due to the fact that the suppressed desire is still there, it is poised to erupt upon seeing beauty, as is exemplified by Tadzio. At that time, his cerebral defences will fall, exposing the fragility of the persona that he has established. This suppression is a character flaw. There is a congruence between this and Freud's concept of sublimation, which describes the process by which prohibited urges are diverted into constructive creative effort. This idea of repression is congruent with Freud's idea of sublimation, which is a notion that he developed. He asserted his concept about sublimation; "Sublimation is a process that concerns instincts whose goal is changed, who turn away from sexual aims and direct themselves toward aims valued by society. It is this capacity for modifying instinctual aims that makes possible the highest cultural achievements." (Freud 394) The

phrase shows Freud's idea that civilisation is built through moving forbidden or socially destructive desires into artistic, intellectual, or moral activities. Freud thought that this was the basis for the rise of civilisation. In this context, Freud saw sublimation not only as a sort of suppression, but as a transformative redirection of desire into culturally beneficial manifestations. This idea really resonates with literary characters whose jobs as artists either hide, divert, or sublimate their inner conflicts.

The act of repressing one's feelings, according to Mann, comes with a significant psychological cost that must be borne. Aschenbach had a "yearning for distant places" as a consequence of his meeting with the peculiar visitor outside the Munich mortuary. This "yearning" was entirely irrational and could not have been expected in any way (Mann 4). My "yearning" was brought on by the interaction that I had with the other person. During this particular period, the concept that Venice's self-governance is on the point of unravelling and coming apart is presented. This is an indicator of what Freud referred to as the return of the repressed, which is the surfacing of desires that have been repressed into awareness. If discipline is ineffective, this behaviour is a symptom of this phenomenon. In Freud's terminology, this process is referred to as "the return of the repressed." Thus, the process of drug possession starts prior to the interaction between Aschenbach and Tadzio. This is due to its result. This is mostly due to the link shared between the two individuals. Having evolved into art, the aesthetic impulse seeks expression that transcends mere simplicity and encompasses the corporeal. This realisation occurred as a result of the transition. By conflating beauty with decay and desire with mortality, Venice elevates itself above a mere holiday spot, so fulfilling its image as a tourist destination. Andre Aciman characterises Venice as "a city where desire is both reborn and extinguished" (Aciman 77). This description formed the foundation of Mann's picture of Venice. Aciman often alluded to Mann's portrayal of Venice in his writings. At this point, Aciman makes a very important point. At the same time, Aschenbach gets ready for the environment and thinks about how drunk he will feel when these things happen. The primary distinction between Mann's and Wilde's aestheticism lies in the fact that the former does not incorporate an external corruptor. In the capacity of a "narcotic voice," Lord Henry is tasked with corrupting Dorian Gray through the employment of clever retorts and language designed to evoke reflection.

"There was something in his low, musical voice that seemed to enchain him. His words were like a flute… and the mere sound of them was intoxicating" (Wilde 28). The phrases demonstrate that Dorian's demise is not caused by his own internal inclinations, but rather by Henry's persuasive discourse. By comparing Henry's voice to that of a "flute," the parallel highlights the fact that his power resides in the aesthetic sound of his voice rather than the moral substance of his voice; beauty in word, rather than beauty in form, corrupts. This particular scene embodies Wilde's perspective that ideas, when presented in a sensuous and glamorised manner, have the potential to mould a life just as profoundly as art does. Dorian is pushed into an artistic worldview that prioritises experience, youth, and pleasure above ethics by Henry, who plays the role of a decadent philosopher. Henry's humorous provocations drive Dorian in this direction. The result is that Wilde constructs a paradigm of aestheticism in which corruption is interpersonal and results from the persuasive power of another person's words. Henry is the trigger whose verbal talent awakens and legitimises Dorian's dormant impulses. As Tadzio does not confront Aschenbach, despite being the individual responsible for his own moral decline in *Death in Venice*. The substance embodies beauty intrinsically.

Beauty as a Drug: Tadzio as the Spark

The visual astonishment that Aschenbach encountered upon initially encountering Tadzio is depicted by Mann through language that is both sensuous and subtly hallucinatory. He observes that the infant evokes "the memory of Greek sculpture" (Mann 24). He proceeds to describe her as "a figure of such exquisite beauty" (Mann 24). It is inherently impossible to recognise Tadzio as a psychological individual, as he functions solely as an aesthetic object, embodying Plato's concept of ideal beauty. To fully understand the addictive quality of Aschenbach's obsession, this idealisation is utterly essential.

In Aschenbach's first vision of Tadzio, beauty is revealed not as a benign experience but as a dangerous element capable of altering consciousness. Mann's language—sensuous, dazzling, and charged with classical associations—transforms the boy into an aesthetic force that works directly on the psyche. Tadzio's beauty bypasses moral thought and enters Aschenbach as a kind of psychic poison. His form, described through sculptural imagery, becomes the vector through which the writer's carefully built discipline is eroded. (Luke 17)

According to David Luke, Mann uses beauty as a psychological force that destroys everything in *Death in Venice*. This becomes clear when Aschenbach meets Tadzio. Mann views beauty as a "dangerous element" that directly influences the unconscious, escaping moral and logical restrictions rather than inspiring or intellectual advancement. Beauty is seldom presented this way. Tadzio's idealised character and works make Aschenbach lose control. Sensual, bright, and classically inflected words turn Tadzio into an artistic apparition. Aschenbach senses this beauty by feeling, not thought, as Luke calls it "psychic poison". Like a drug, it makes him lose sight of his lifelong disciplined creative self. Tadzio is idealised and lacks psychological depth, which enhances the danger: beauty, devoid of human complexity, addicts Aschenbach, bringing obsession, hallucinations, and devastation.

A stimulant is what beauty transforms into in the novel authored by Mann. Aschenbach gradually develops a heightened sense of perception, his ideas quicken, and the creative standstill that he had been experiencing disappears. "He experienced a rekindling of inspiration, as if youth was returning to him" (Mann 32) It is at this point that he starts to feel

an infusion of creative energy that is almost ecstatic. In the same way that it heightens emotions of vigour, pleasure, and heightened awareness, this experience is comparable to the first stages of chemical intoxication. The purposeful relationship that has been established between the effects of drugs and artistic expression has been underlined repeatedly by researchers working in academic institutions. When it comes to beauty, Mann is described as these can be encounter in these lines "a form of opiate that provides the pleasure of transcendence while rendering the individual confused and reliant," (Heilbut 142) as stated by Anthony Heilbut. Tadzio, as represented by Aschenbach, serves as a conduit for spiritual liberation and a catalyst for psychological dissolution. This is analogous to the effect that opium has on a person who uses it on a regular basis. Moreover, Tadzio is responsible for causing people to go through psychological crises. In the article of J.M Ritchie as he asserted Tadzio beauty as a two side of one coin in these lines;
Tadzio offers Aschenbach an experience that feels like spiritual expansion, a momentary release from the constraints of his austere, Apollonian life. Yet this expansion is inseparable from danger. Mann constructs Tadzio's beauty as a double-edged force, one that uplifts only by undermining the stability of the beholder. (Ritchie 144-145)
J. M. Ritchie says Tadzio's beauty defies Aschenbach and kills him. Thus, it is called "two sides of the same coin."Aschenbach temporarily escapes the self-denial, self-control, and discipline that have shaped his Apollonian artistry when Tadzio is around. Tadzio represents spiritual freedom in bodily form. Tadzio may reactivate Aschenbach's long-buried emotions and creative impulses, suggesting he has enormous transcendence. However, Ritchie notes that this high position is always dangerous. The more Aschenbach feels he is spiritually developing, the worse his mental health. The artist struggles with Tadzio's appeal. Alcohol makes him feel better but damages his self-control, reason, and discipline, which kept him alive. This shows how *Death in Venice's* perfect beauty might inspire people to transcend or kill themselves. The power that frees him also causes his demise.

The Disintegration of Reasonable Self-Control

As the intensity of Aschenbach's yearning grows, his moral and cognitive powers begin to deteriorate. Rather of continuing to adhere to his former dedication to discipline, he starts to indulge in indulgences that were before strange to him. He begins to engage in illogical, obsessive, and compulsive thinking patterns. according to what Mann wrote about Aschenbach in these lines; "followed him, secretly, like a criminal," (Mann 41). The metaphor conveys both a decline in morality and an addiction to something. When the desire to see Tadzio becomes overwhelming, it takes precedence over rationality and proper behaviour.
The beginning of psychological dependence may be traced back to this transition. Freud refers to this phenomenon as "repetition compulsion," which is an instinctive urge towards self-destructive behaviour. Aschenbach's desire develops into a compulsion, which is related to this phenomenon. Rather of fulfilling the urge, each contact with Tadzio makes it stronger, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of intoxication throughout the relationship.
At this point in his life, Aschenbach is no longer elevated by beauty; rather, it enslaves him. The influence that Camille Paglia refers to as "the tyranny of beauty" in modernist literature is characterised by the fact that aesthetic standards have the ability to paralyse the moral will (Paglia 189). This paralysis is a physical manifestation of Aschenbach's condition: he stops writing, disregards warnings about the cholera spread, and continues to reside in Venice despite the growing risk. When it comes to his mentality, beauty takes precedence over logic as the guiding force.

An Individual's Artistic Identity as a Psychological Prison

As an artist, Aschenbach's artistic career was doomed to fail due to the nature of his personality. His preoccupation with Tadzio is a manifestation of his previous creative aspirations; nevertheless, it has reached an unhealthy level and has become pathological. The way in which Michael Mann blurs the line between creative inspiration and neurotic obsession demonstrates how aesthetic standards have the potential to take control of the conscious mind as Mann in his work portrays about inner world in these lines;
He had grown accustomed to viewing every stirring of emotion with suspicion, mastering it sternly in the name of form and artistic conscience. But this lifelong austerity, this relentless policing of his inner world, had resulted in a creative spirit tense to the point of fracture—one that mistook repression for virtue and discipline for destiny.
The above passage reveals the essence of Aschenbach's creative nature by demonstrating how his strong sense of self-discipline finally causes problems for his mental health. He believes that in order to be really creative, you must be able to disregard your emotions, maintain perfect control, and be disciplined. He now understands that he should not trust everything he feels. He is less creative and more inflexible than that person since he believes moral fortitude is a technique to mask his emotions. He is fragile, very regulated, and prone to falling apart because he is too concerned with his inner life. This not only makes it difficult for him to complete his tasks, but it also causes them to break. Aschenbach believes that austerity, discipline, and emotional control are crucial qualities for an artist, but they are also the characteristics that reveal his limitations. As a result, Tadzio's appeal would ultimately produce a psychological gap between the two of them. It is through the application of concepts from ancient mythology, philosophy, and art history that Aschenbach starts to understand Tadzio. Therefore, the infant is the embodiment of "the godlike" (Mann 56), and simultaneously, Aschenbach's language develops into a vocabulary that is ecstatic, religious, and devotional. This idealisation, on the other hand, is a factor that adds to the mental disintegration that he is experiencing. The contrast that Friedrich Nietzsche

makes between the Apollonian and the Dionysian is applicable in this situation: Aschenbach's Apollonian control loses way to the Dionysian wrath, which is characterised by the collapse of boundaries and the supremacy of instinct over form. There are a great number of commentators that highlight the significance of this movement. Reed argues that Aschenbach's preoccupation is an example of "the destruction of the artist by his own ideals" (Reed 203). The discipline that once offered him comfort becomes obsolete; the quest for artistic purity shifts from a creative goal to an existential peril. His identification offers no protection; instead, it just serves to hinder him. Beauty is intrinsically constrained by limitations. Ultimately, the artist became enslaved by his own thoughts and developed an addiction to it.

Addiction to Aesthetics and Hallucinations

By the time the novella reaches its conclusion, Aschenbach is experiencing delirium and dreamscapes that are comparable to the symptoms that are associated with an overdose of a drug. His dream about Dionysus, which is filled with visions of rituals and acts of violence, is the clearest examples of this phenomenon. According to what Mann has written, is what he came across in these lines; "the god with wild hair leading a frenzied ritual of ecstasy and destruction" (Mann 71). This dream, which was influenced by aesthetic intoxication, is symbolic of the moment when reasoning surrenders to aesthetic intoxication for the very first time.

As a result of Aschenbach's hallucinations becoming more confused with reality, he begins to interpret Tadzio's movements as signs of intent directed against him. He is under the impression that Tadzio can be encounter in these line; "beckoned him to follow" (The Mann 79) in the direction you are going. Furthermore, the situation is not only depressing and delusional, but it also sheds light on the psychological realm. It would seem that Aschenbach has stopped being able to distinguish between creative dreams and the actual world. When he finally achieves total mastery over his consciousness, it is the pinnacle of his obsession.

A increase in tolerance, an intensification of cravings, a loss of control, and finally death are all characteristics that are shared by the advancement of this stage, which is comparable to that of substance addiction. The last word, in which Aschenbach dies away while staring at Tadzio, is the one that completes the metaphor so that it may be used effectively. When beauty is involved, it is not just a destructive substance, but also a lethal one.

As Aschenbach's infatuation intensifies, Mann situates his decline within a framework vividly reminiscent of substance abuse. The writer's attempts to regulate his emotions collapse under the force of an ever-growing appetite for the boy's presence, producing psychological symptoms that critics describe as 'craving-driven compulsion.' His secrecy, self-deception, and willingness to abandon moral boundaries reveal a subject overtaken by a destructive dependency. The final image of his death on the beach is thus not a romanticized surrender, but the last stage of an addiction cycle: the moment when the intoxicant—here, the irresistible beauty embodied by Tadzio—overpowers the addict entirely, transforming aesthetic desire into a lethal force. (Kurzke 280–283)

Mann doesn't make it clear that Aschenbach's interest in Tadzio is a short-term or positive thing. He instead shows it as a process that takes a long time and is bad for people. The pull gets stronger and more addictive, which makes it harder for the writer to control themselves. Each peek is like a drug hit that makes you want more after it wears off. This is how Mann shows that Aschenbach is very interested in Tadzio. These are the exact signs of drug abuse that doctors look for: dropping your morals to keep the urge going, using rationalisation to explain why you use, and keeping lies to keep access. What starts as controlled discipline—thoughtful pondering, travel, and the appearance of control—slowly breaks down into excessive surveillance, secretive behaviour, and a string of lies that make it hard to see the loss of freedom. To show this internal decline, Mann uses invasive pictures, repeat, and a closer look at Aschenbach's needs. This is done so that the bodily need for beautiful experience is not seen as a way to clean oneself. Because of this, the last scene of the story, where Aschenbach lies on the beach and looks at the boy while he dies, is not seen as a brave act of total surrender but as the last step in a circle of addiction. Tadzio's stunning looks are so powerful that they can overcome people's strength and willpower. This transforms a standard of beauty into a harmful and eventually lethal power that reveals the physical and moral impacts of uncontrolled aesthetic desire.

The Metaphorical Drugscape of Venice

The portrayal of Venice that Mann has created is an essential component of the narcotic aesthetics concept. The city is depicted as being lazy, seductive, attractive, and decaying, all of which are characteristics that are similar to the impact that Tadzio had on Aschenbach. Aschenbach's defences are weakened as a result of the atmospheric sensory overload that is created by the heat, the odours, and the shimmering light. The city of Venice has the effect of an intoxication, enhancing desire while suppressing prudence.

A metaphor for Aschenbach's psychological infection is provided by the cholera epidemic that occurred in the aforementioned city. Venice tries to hide the fact that there is disease by saying that "officials denied the alarming reports" (Mann 62). Aschenbach does the same thing to hide the moral contagion that is spreading in his thoughts. The fact that he is unwilling to leave Venice is a reflection of his inability to resist the artistic intoxication. Within the context of the novella, Venice is described by Walter Benjamin as "a terrain where death and beauty form an inseparable unity" (Benjamin 114). Aschenbach's fall is accelerated by the corrupting pull of the city, which draws him further into delusion, self-deception, and aesthetic idolatry. As Benjamin states; "Venice is the supreme emblem of

seduction and decay, where beauty and death continually exchange masks." (Benjamin 66).This remark by Benjamin lends credence to the concept that Venice is a "drugscape" that is made up of a variety of sensations, which makes it more difficult for Aschenbach to maintain control of himself. It is a reflection of his own disintegration that the city is breaking apart since it has both positive and harmful aspects. Aschenbach's sentiments of attraction to Tadzio become even more intense as a result of the allure of immobility that Venice provides, which accelerates his transition into a more severe mental condition. As in the work of Thomas asserted about moral and emotional deterioration in these lines;

Venice's crumbling architecture and pervasive atmosphere of decomposition operate as a spatial metaphor for Aschenbach's unraveling psyche. As scholars note, Mann deliberately situates the protagonist in a city whose structural instability mirrors his own moral and emotional deterioration. The paradoxical charm of Venice—its luminous facades masking hidden rot—aligns with the dual nature of Aschenbach's desire: outwardly elevated, inwardly corrupting. The city's gradual descent into disease becomes indistinguishable from Aschenbach's descent into obsession, suggesting that the environment amplifies his susceptibility to aesthetic intoxication. In this sense, Venice functions not simply as setting but as a corroding substance that accelerates the dissolution of the self. (Boysen 241–244)

According to Boysen, Mann used the deterioration of Venice's beauty as a metaphor for Aschenbach's moral and emotional downfall. Boysen discusses this particular illustration. It is clear that the protagonist's mental state is deteriorating, as shown by the city's deteriorating structures, offensive odours, and overall sense of devastation. The implication of this is that, much like the metropolis that surrounds him, his once-strong self-control is disintegrating. Similar to the apparent beauty of Venice, which is composed of glittering surfaces that cover rot, Aschenbach's dual goal, which seems to be noble and creative but is really unstable and destructive, is comparable to the dual ambition of Venice. It is an indication of the psychological contagion that Aschenbach's preoccupation with Tadzio is producing because the city is experiencing a cholera epidemic, which is spreading across the city. It is not just the environment that makes him worse, but it also makes things worse by causing him to lose his sense of right and wrong, his sense of who he is, and his capacity to make sound choices. The city of Venice plays a significant part in Aschenbach's demise because it transforms the concept of beauty and decay into a powerful representation of how his own values and feelings have evolved over time.

Comparison with Wilde's Novel: Aestheticism Untainted by Corruption

A quick comparison with Wilde demonstrates how distinctive Mann's work is, despite the fact that the majority of this study is focused on Mann. An attractive philosophy of Lord Henry, which is offered in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* under the pretence of an externally administered psychological medicine, is one of the reasons that leads to Dorian Gray's breakdown. This philosophy is delivered in the form of a psychological medicine. The novel *Death in Venice* does not include any characters that are comparable to this one in any way. Aschenbach is the one who is responsible for his own demise, which is also known as his own pass away. It is his suppressed urges, his creative drive, and his need for immaculate beauty that are the root causes of his addiction, which originates from the depths of his being. The cumulative effect of all of these factors is what led to his addiction.

The difference that is emphasised by Mann's modernist criticism is that beauty on its own, without any impact from the outside world, is sufficient to bring about the destruction of the individual who elevates it to the status of an absolute. While Wilde paints a picture of the taint of innocence, Mann conjures a vision of the artist's own self-corruption. Wilde writes about the taint of innocence. The artwork by Wilde is more well-known than the one by Mann. However, despite the fact that Mann's representation is more emotionally charged, psychological, and intimate than the other one, both of them exhibit the addictive elements that are connected with the pleasure of creative endeavours.

The gulf between Mann's and Wilde's visions lies in their attribution of corruptive power: Mann locates destruction within the artist's own psyche, where the pursuit of beauty becomes a form of self-administered poison, while Wilde positions corruption as an external contagion infiltrating the subject from the social and moral environment. Aschenbach collapses under the pressure of an internal ideal turned tyrannical, whereas Dorian succumbs to the seduction of influences embodied by Lord Henry. Yet both texts converge in their recognition that aesthetic experience—whether self-generated or externally imposed—possesses an addictive undertow capable of obliterating the self. (Nehamas 152–155)

The above lines portray the corruptions of the mind. The fact that both writers finally came to the conclusion that creative experience was too addictive is also shown by this. In *Death in Venice*, Mann demonstrates that corruption exists inside the mind of the artist, so highlighting the fact that an internal creative ideal has the potential to become tyrannical and do harm to the individual who worships it. The excessive idealisation of beauty that Aschenbach exhibits eventually turns into a "self-administered poison," which is an example of how this phenomenon may demonstrate itself. Aschenbach's beliefs render beauty lethal, not because of anything external to him, but rather because they render it absolute and render him incapable of resisting his own desires. On the other hand, Wilde demonstrates in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that corruption originates from the outside and spreads from its source. The attractive philosophy of Lord Henry and his opulent social environment are the sources of the moral virus that he portrays as spreading across the society. Mann is of the opinion that the artist is the one who corrupts himself by being too concentrated on oneself, but Wilde is of the opinion that beauty is corrupted due to external factors. Despite the fact that these two works are distinct from one another, they both concur that beauty has a quality that causes individuals to experience a sense of being overpowered by themselves.

It is possible that the demand for aesthetic pleasure might be harmful, since it can result in the dissolution of identity and highlight the risk of placing an emphasis on beauty rather than morality or emotional stability. This is the case regardless of whether the desire derives from an external source (Wilde) or an internal one (Mann).

Conclusion

The novel *Death in Venice*, written by Thomas Mann, provides a comprehensive investigation of the question of whether or not creative yearning might be interpreted as a type of psychological drunkenness. The novella illustrates how the search of beauty, when idealised beyond ethical and intellectual limitations, may lead to the destabilisation of the mind, the loss of personal discipline, and the appearance of moral paralysis and self-destruction. This is shown by the novella. The failure of Gustav von Aschenbach is not the product of manipulation from the outside world; rather, it is the outcome of the intrinsic internal logic that is present in his creative preoccupations. Attractiveness, which serves as both an appeal and a driving force for him, finally subdues him and brings him to a state of submission.
The tragedy of Aschenbach rests in the intrinsic contradiction of aesthetic experience: beauty, which he had previously exalted into art, reemerges in tangible form and engulfs the exact discipline that had previously given him with mastery. This is the tragedy that Aschenbach has experienced. Because of this, the novella serves as a warning tale about the perils of confusing creative ideals with actual life. This is the reason why it is a cautionary tale. According to Mann, when beauty is converted into a seductive, euphoric, and devouring drug, it does not result in enlightenment but rather in annihilation or destruction.

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