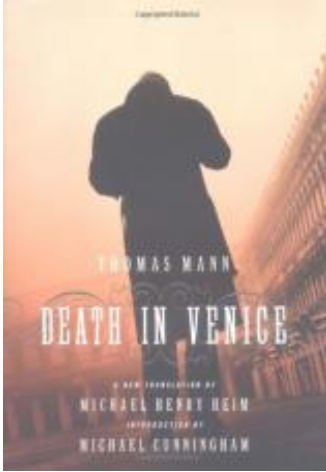


Death in Venice

by Thomas Mann



About the Book

Published on the eve of World War I, a decade after **Buddenbrooks** had established Thomas Mann as a literary celebrity, **Death in Venice** tells the story of Gustav von Aschenbach, a successful but aging writer who follows his wanderlust to Venice in search of spiritual fulfillment that instead leads to his erotic doom.

In the decaying city, besieged by an unnamed epidemic, he becomes obsessed with an exquisite Polish boy, Tadzio. "It is a story of the voluptuousness of doom," Mann wrote. "But the problem I had especially in mind was that of the artist's dignity."

Discussion Guide

1. What was your initial perception of Aschenbach -- both as a writer and as a man -- and did that perception change as the story progressed?
2. What ignites Aschenbach's wanderlust and compels him to leave his home on a holiday? What does he hope to gain during his travels?
3. When Aschenbach sets out on his journey from Munich, he does not have a destination in mind. What ultimately leads him to Venice?
4. In what ways does Aschenbach embody both his father's "sober, conscientious nature" and the "darker, more fiery impulses" (pg 12) of his mother?

5. Other than physical beauty, what is it about Tadzio that attracts the interest of Aschenbach? Is the attraction merely sexual in nature, or does Tadzio represent something more to Aschenbach?
6. How does Mann's use of Greek mythology illuminate Aschenbach's story?
7. Is it possible to have a relationship with someone by sight only, as Aschenbach believes in regard to himself and Tadzio (with whom he never speaks directly)? Does Aschenbach imagine Tadzio's returned interest?
8. How does Aschenbach's fervent interest in learning the truth about the cholera outbreak mirror his obsession with Tadzio?
9. Why does Aschenbach decide to stay in Venice despite the risk of contracting cholera, a disease that is often fatal?
10. The book's title is an indication of how the story ends. Did having this foreknowledge affect your reading of **Death in Venice**?
11. How do you interpret the story's ending?
12. What, in your opinion, is the message Mann is conveying in Death in Venice?

Author Bio

German essayist, cultural critic, and novelist, Thomas Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929. Among his most famous works are **Buddenbrooks**, published when he was just twenty-six, **The Magic Mountain**, and **Doctor Faustus**.

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