Eros and the Creative Process
in
Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il fuoco*

by

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between two texts which have rarely been considered together; namely, Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* (1900). This comparison will pivot around the parallels surrounding the concept of Eros, and the impact of this force on the creative process, as presented by Mann and D'Annunzio. In each text the protagonist is an artist who experiences creative difficulties, and, in Venice, encounters an object of desire. This encounter triggers artistic creation in both artists, as the objects of desire act as muses; but when intoxicating erotic impulses eclipse creative focus, productivity is impeded. We see that Eros' presence inspires, but also threatens, artistic production. Both artists become battlegrounds for artistic and erotic impulses; but only D'Annunzio's protagonist succeeds in sublimating Eros to art, whilst Mann's artist finally succumbs to his obsession, and to death. My study involves close analysis of several thematic threads common to both texts: the shared setting of Venice, and the significance of this decadent city; the classicism (and classical allusions) inherent to each text; the portrayal of desire and possession; and the representation of the creative process.

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Introduction

Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il fuoco* (1900) are two works which have rarely been considered together. Their relationship has not been extensively investigated, yet there are striking affinities between them. The thesis will investigate these, analysing similarities and differences between the texts. The principal affinity around which this study will pivot is the relationship between Eros and the creative process.

In each text, the protagonist is an artist facing creative difficulties, who encounters a figure in Venice who triggers their desire. Interaction with this figure stimulates the artists' creativity (leading to the production of artistic works) but also impedes this creativity. D'Annunzio's protagonist, Stelio Effrena, is inspired by the famous and beautiful actress, La Foscarina, and Mann's Gustav von Aschenbach writes in the presence of a young Polish boy, Tadzio, whose perfect beauty catches the artist's eye. Foscarina also distracts Stelio with her demands as a lover, however, and Aschenbach's obsession with Tadzio eventually reaches such an intensity that he is unable to focus on further artistic production. The impulses of desire felt by Stelio and Aschenbach signify the presence of Eros, representative of erotic desire; in this way, Eros both aids and hinders the process of artistic creation. The relationship between Eros and creativity constitutes the major thematic parallel between these two texts.

Chapter One: Venice

In *Il fuoco* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, Venice provides more than a shared setting against which the narratives unfold; it pervades the characters and their fate. In both texts Venice displays an active, rather than passive nature, functioning as an inspiration, a work of art, a death-trap, a labyrinth, a temptress and an allegorical device.

D'Annunzio first visited Venice in 1887. His arrival by boat was 'un approdo memorabile',[1] and henceforth the city was to remain prominent in his imagination and works. He spoke publicly on three occasions in Venice; the speech made by Stelio Effrena in *Il fuoco* is based heavily on one of D'Annunzio's own.

Mann visited Venice in the summer of 1911 with his wife and his brother, Heinrich; he received the news of Gustav Mahler's death a few days before his trip. It is believed by some critics, such as Shookman,[2] that the news so affected Mann that he gave his protagonist Mahler's first name. Mann's diaries document his sojourn, mentioning a young Polish boy who caught Mann's eye.[3] His fascination with this boy was adapted to provide the central thread for Aschenbach's Venetian experience in *Der Tod in Venedig*.

Reed suggests that there could hardly be a setting which so suited Mann, and which provided such apt connotations, as Venice.[4] For this is a city linked to one of Mann's favourite poets, August von Platen (1796–1835), who wrote on (among other

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[1] 'a memorable approach', Mario Isnenghi, *L'Italia del Fascio* (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriali, 1996), p. 48.
[2] Ellis Shookman, *Thomas Mann's Death in Venice, a Novella and its Critics* (Suffolk: Camden House, 2003), p. 82.
[3] For further discussion of Mann's encounter with this young Polish boy in Venice, see Gilbert Adair, *The Real Tadzio: Thomas Mann's 'Death in Venice' and the Boy Who Inspired It* (London: Short Books, 2001).
[4] Terence James Reed, *Death in Venice, Making and Unmaking a Master* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 75.

themes) homo-erotic desire. Venice is also tied in Mann's mind to 'things decadent (Wagner) and with the ambition to overcome them (Nietzsche)'.[5] The presence of the sea is also significant: the Venetian beach allows Aschenbach to observe Tadzio and his form in his more revealing beach attire, and provides a space intended for relaxation and freedom from daily constraints. This is 'where Mann retreats to write more freely',[6] which he appears to share with his protagonist. For Mann, the sea represents 'the most absolute instance of structural repetition',[7] appearing in *Buddenbrooks* (1901), for example, as a holiday destination for each generation of the family. The sea is also linked with death, and it is towards the ocean that Aschenbach feels himself beckoned on the beach in his final moments by the Hermes-like figure of Tadzio.

D'Annunzio's 'romanzo veneziano'[8] takes place entirely in Venice, in locations such as Piazza San Marco, Strà, and Murano. This is not the case with *Der Tod in Venedig*. Mann's Aschenbach first appears in his native Munich, where his creative sterility brings on a 'Reiselust'[9] that leads him initially to the Adriatic island of Pola. Aschenbach soon realises that Venice should have been his destination (T 573), and thence he travels. His path to Venice is not direct, and the city is no simple holiday spot where the artist can relax. Rather, Aschenbach becomes aware of an unwholesome atmosphere, and resolves to leave. A luggage mix-up (conveniently) scuppers his plans, however, and Aschenbach never leaves Venice again. This abortive attempt to leave will be re-examined later.

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ritchie Robertson, 'Classicism and its pitfalls: *Death in Venice*', in Ritchie Robertson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 68.
[7] Ibid., p. 69.
[8] Gabriele D'Annunzio and Giacomo Prandolini (eds.), *Prose scelte: Antologia d'autore (1906)* (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1995), p. 355.
[9] 'desire to travel', Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* in *Frühe Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1981), p. 562. Henceforth *Der Tod in Venedig* will be referred to in parentheses in the text proper as T, followed by the page number, e.g. (T 562).

One of Venice's key functions in the two texts is as a city of art. Famed as a unique city on the water, and once 'the possessor of a model government and […] a state of commanding economic power',[10] Venice has attracted countless artists and thinkers. Its reputation as a city of art has been bolstered by its presence in the works of Shakespeare, Byron and George Sand (for example), and its artistic significance was consolidated by the death of Wagner in the city in 1883. For Nietzsche, 'Venice' is synonymous with 'music', an art form he considered of paramount significance: 'Wenn ich ein andres Wort für Musik suche, so finde ich immer nur das Wort Venedig'.[11] Mann's and D'Annunzio's artist-protagonists find themselves affected by Venice, with which they develop a relationship that is at least as strong as their relationship with other characters in their environment. Their relationship with art becomes inextricably bound to their relationship with Venice, which influences the artistic process. The city is the catalyst for complex psychological developments for Aschenbach, including a spurt of creativity. Likewise for Stelio, artistic inspiration comes not only from Foscarina, but also from Venice.

In his search for a new modern tragedy and a revitalisation of art and culture, Stelio finds himself stimulated by the city itself, which offers 'an orgy of intoxicating sense impressions'.[12] For Stelio, only Venice can '[...] incitare la virtù attiva del suo intelletto e tutte quante le energie del suo essere verso il grado supremo'.[13] He recalls

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[10] Margaret Plant, *Venice, Fragile City, 1797-1997* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 9.
[11] 'When I search for another word for music, I always find only the word "Venice"', Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe,* ed. Paolo d'Iorio, Klug, § 7 < http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/EH-Klug-7> [accessed: 01.01.2012].
[12] Nachum Schoffman, 'D'Annunzio and Mann: Antithetical Wagnerisms', *The Journal of Musicology*, 11 (1993), 499-524 (p. 512).
[13] '[...] activate the power of his intellect and all the energies of his being towards the supreme ideal', Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1900), p. 99. *Il fuoco* will henceforth be referred to in parentheses in the text proper as F, followed by the page number, e.g. (F 99).

artistic mastery of the past, invoking Pisanello and Giorgione[14] in the hope that the crowds before him will be moved to emulate them. Yet something inherent in the city itself inflames him artistically, sometimes to a fever pitch: it has 'la virtù di stimolare la potenza della vita umana in certe ore eccitando tutti i desiderii sino alla febbre'[15] (F 9). Addressing Venice's citizens on the subject of Venice and art, Stelio speaks of a flame[16] that endows Venice with a power of expression never seen before, noting that this unique city possesses 'una aspirazione spontanea e costante verso ideali armonie'[17] (F 74), just as within the soul of a pure artist.

Within this city of art, we encounter a renowned and revered artist in an episode adapted from history. Richard Wagner is both praised and criticised by the artistic community of *Il fuoco*, who nevertheless show him awe and respect. D'Annunzio himself admired the great 'dio germano'[18] (F 183), especially his use of myth, but also regretted that this 'grande collaboratore-avversario all'idea dell'arte nuova'[19] did not give enough emphasis to the word. Stelio and his friend Daniele Glauro chance upon Wagner on the Venetian waters, and consider themselves blessed to carry the ailing musician from his boat when he collapses. They will later bear his coffin at his funeral. D'Annunzio's choice of incorporating Wagner's death in his novel is significant: the death of Wagner, he implies, signifies the death of art.

Yet hope remains for art in D'Annunzio's eyes: after carrying Wagner from his boat, Stelio is struck suddenly by a wave of inspiration that comes directly from

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[14] The names of the painters Pisanello and Giorgione are both linked to Venice and Renaissance brilliance.

[15] 'the capacity to stimulate the powers of human life in certain hours, exciting all desires to a fever'.

[16] For D'Annunzio, the flame is 'the "Life giver," infused by a miraculous beauty that reflected itself in nature' and 'symbolised the "white heat" of the spirit, the nobler passions of man, the heroic, and [...], the images of poetry as expressions of the human will.' George Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: H. Fertig, 1980), p. 91.

[17] 'a spontaneous, constant desire for ideal harmony'.

[18] 'Germanic god'.

[19] 'The great collaborator-adversary in the idea of new art', Giorgio Squarotti, *Invio alla lettura di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milano: Mursia, 1982), p . 113.

Venice. Perceiving 'un desidero musicale'[20] (F 154), Stelio discerns a melodic theme developing on the winds. The melody and the winds (bearing the melancholy of the whole world – for melancholy is of vital importance to D'Annunzio[21]) drive Stelio into a frenzy, and he sees visions of Mycenae, Agamemnon and Cassandra. Daniele witnesses his creative fervour, and even glimpses the visions that Stelio transmits to him with his poetic words. It is Stelio's great hope that he can transmit his artistic visions to others, and his creative frustration is largely centred around his struggle to find expression – therein lies the value of Stelio's lover, Foscarina. As well as inspiring him to artistic greatness (like Venice, but with an even greater potency), she also transmits his art in her capacity as an actress. The flame of life, and art, is kept alive. Stelio's speech demonstrates 'la vittoria dell'Arte liberatrice su le miserie e su le inquietudine e sui tedii dei giorni comuni'[22] (F 84) – but this victory must endure, and outlast the 'felice intervallo'[23] (F 84) of Stelio's speech.

Venice's effect on Aschenbach seems more subtle and complex. It is Tadzio who truly captivates Aschenbach, but the city has a hand in the proceedings. Venice conjures up vivid mythological images for Aschenbach, and causes him to (mis)interpret his existence there in mythological terms. The quotidian events of daybreak and sunset undergo mythical metamorphoses; Aschenbach sees Helios' chariot in the sun's movements, and Zephyr in the wind (T 612), for example. A transfiguration of Venice 'transports' Aschenbach to ancient Athens where he witnesses (indeed, 'becomes') Socrates teaching Phaedrus (T 607), and the Venetian

[20] 'a musical desire'.
[21] For further discussion upon D'Annunzio and the theme of melancholy, see Gianni Oliva, *D'Annunzio e la malinconia*, (Milan: B. Mondadori, 2007)
[22] 'the victory of Art the liberator over the miseries and worries and tedium of every day'.
[23] 'happy interlude'.

beach reveals Tadzio emerging from the water Venus-like.[24] Such transfigurations – or delusions – impact heavily on Aschenbach, intensifying his moral dilemma by 'ennobling' his desires, and stimulating the imagination of the classical writer.

Venice, then, inspires art and artistic thinking. Yet the city is not what it once was. The Venice of Mann and D'Annunzio appears as a symbol of fallen glory and artistic stagnation, decaying and deteriorating. As *fin de siècle* texts, *Il fuoco* and *Der Tod in Venedig* are shaped partly by their historical and cultural contexts; their depiction of Venice reflects this. Venice in these texts reflects the cultural decadence perceived by D'Annunzio and Mann, and expresses their diagnoses of contemporary Europe. An understanding of their reactions to this decadence helps us understand Venice's function. For both writers, bourgeois society is artistically stagnant and apathetic, mirrored in the image of a decaying Venice, once a glorious, cosmopolitan city, but now 'senza palpito e senza respiro, morta nelle sue verdi acque'[25] (F 38), 'der gesunkenen Königin'[26] (T 596).

D'Annunzio values aestheticism as a refuge from bourgeois mediocrity. In later literature he incorporates the 'superuomo'[27] into his aesthetic approach, whereby certain exceptional individuals (who recognise bourgeois stagnation) couple their aestheticism with a right to impose their own will onto the dull and complacent world. Hence we see Stelio Effrena speaking in Venice, fervently attempting to convey his aesthetic dream to the masses, and revitalise culture.

Mann's reaction to decadence is more differentiated. As Mundt notes, for example, although *Der Tod in Venedig* 'takes us on a journey of decadence and

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[24] Daniel Schwarz, *Reconfiguring Modernism: Explorations in the Relationship between Modern Art and Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 74.
[25] 'without pulse and without breath, dead in her own green waters'.
[26] 'the sunken queen'.
[27] 'the superman'; see Mary Ann Frese Witt, *Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic* (Cranbury: Rosemont, 2007), p. 72.

nihilism during which Aschenbach loses his discipline and, eventually, control over his life',[28] distance is preserved through the narrator, whose comments offer a critical position on Aschenbach's decadence. It seems Mann felt compelled to document the decadence he witnessed, but generally did so critically. *Der Tod in Venedig* documents 'a failed overcoming of decadence'.[29] Aschenbach's loss of control causes him to descend towards his death, though Mann describes the process with hints that Aschenbach's 'descent' is *not* tragic. Mann's narrator may be one such hint, periodically criticising Aschenbach,[30] and adding interpretative ambiguity to his death. We must also consider the traces of 'decadence' evident (but perhaps parodically intended) in Mann's writing[31]: Robertson points out that 'Thomas Mann's specific approach to decadence is, he says, at once to embrace it and to seek to overcome it'.[32] We therefore struggle to reach a definite conclusion as to Mann's reaction to decadence. In any case, it seems to be a theme which both repelled and fascinated him, and which he relished portraying in his mouldering and ailing Venice.

As Aschenbach approaches Venice by sea, he observes the landmarks of Piazza San Marco, familiar from previous visits. He notes that one should always arrive here by boat, struck by the 'blendende Komposition phantastischen Bauwerks'[33] (T 578). This stunning welcome seems almost a seduction, especially given the more unwholesome aspects (such as the cholera epidemic) which lurk in the city. A sense of foreboding descends as Aschenbach transfers to a gondola: Mann's narrator remarks on the sense of trepidation felt when climbing into a gondola,

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[28] Hannelore Mundt, *Understanding Thomas Mann* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 96.
[29] Hans R. Vaget, cited in Mundt, p. 96.
[30] See, for example, the sarcastic reference to the delirious and sweating Aschenbach as ''der Meister, der würdig gewordene Künstler' ('the master, the worthy artist', T 637).
[31] For example, some critics find the friendship shown by Kai Mölln (who represents 'healthy' art) towards Hanno Buddenbrook (who represents decadent art) in *Buddenbrooks* to be a sign of Mann's own admiration of decadence and aestheticism.
[32] Robertson, p. 48.
[33] 'blinding composition of fantastic architecture'.

declaring that only a *coffin* bears the same black hue, and that the ride invariably reminds one 'an den Tod selbst, an Bahre und düsteres Begängnis und letzte, schweigsame Fahrt'[34] (T 579). Yet there is no more relaxing or comfortable seat in the world. This is a mode of transport unique to Venice, one portrayed with an air of seductive danger. A similar description appears in *Il fuoco*: here the gondola becomes a hearse, and 'la barca di Caronte'[35] (F 30). Suddenly the Venetian canals become the Styx of Hades, the gondoliers transfigure into Charon, boatman of the underworld, and the protagonists are borne somewhere altogether more sinister and, quite literally, hellish.

Venice's apparent beauty, and her stimulating effect on the mind of an artist, renders her something of a seductress or temptress. Indeed, whilst Stelio finds that Venice inspires, he also asks Foscarina: 'Conoscete voi una tentatrice più grande?'[36] (F 9). Mann's narrator gives a similar description of the city, half fairytale and half tourist-trap (T 618), with her 'schmeichlerische und verdächtige Schöne, [...] in deren fauliger Luft die Kunst einst schwelgerisch aufwucherte und welche den Musikern Klänge eingab, die wiegen und buhlerisch einlullen'[37] (T 618). By definition, a 'temptress' must have an aspect of the dangerous, the unwholesome or the sinister, and on closer inspection it seems that the city of Venice embodies temptation.

For Aschenbach, the greatest literal peril is that of the cholera epidemic which has infiltrated the lagoon. The disease has spread from the Ganges, seemingly a reference to the supposed birthplace of Dionysus; this establishes a link between the physical illness that kills Aschenbach and the destructive psychological impulse that leads to the disintegration of his character. Knowledge of the disease is scarce, thanks

[34] 'of death itself, the bier, of the drab funeral and the final wordless ride'.
[35] 'the boat of Charon'.
[36] 'Do you know of a greater temptress?'
[37] 'seductive and suspicious beauty, [...] in whose putrid atmosphere art once thrived rapturously and which had provided musicians with inspiration for swaying and mellifluous melodies'.

to the Venetian authorities' attempts to disinfect the city and cover up the epidemic. But after eating overripe strawberries Aschenbach falls prey to the malady and dies soon afterwards. This is the literal explanation of his death; but his 'demise' is caused by something more than straightforward physical illness.

Aschenbach's demise begins long before he arrives in Venice. Suffering a block in productivity, he takes a walk in his native Munich, breaking his usually rigid routine. During this walk he encounters an exotic looking, red-haired stranger (an echo of Dionysus), who will reappear throughout the novella in various guises, each time acting as another toll of the death bell. A vivid hallucination during the walk carries Aschenbach to an exotic and primordial wilderness, a sinister swampland of phallic symbols. This could perhaps be the source of the cholera epidemic which is said to have originated in the sultry swamps of the Ganges. And this watery landscape also recalls Venice, a city built on a lagoon. Aschenbach's reaction to the vision, 'Entsetzen und rätselhaftem Verlangen'[38] (T 562), suggests the beginning of his seductive descent, as he starts on the irresistible path towards his death.

The links between death and art, then, are evident early on in *Der Tod in Venedig*. Aschenbach's creative difficulties lead him to dangerous visions and ultimately to his death; his path is strewn with images and symbols of death and decay. But along this path he also experiences an episode of genuine artistic illumination.

Stelio's experience is not dissimilar, thanks to both Venice and Foscarina. As a muse and a lover, Foscarina is aware that she is sometimes more of an obstacle than a catalyst to Stelio's creativity, and knows that eventually she must depart, leaving him free to create. But she is drawn to death, and we find hints that she will die. The

[38] 'horror and mysterious longing'.

lines around her eyes give them the appearance of violets (symbolic of death and mourning), and after becoming agitated at losing Stelio in a maze she almost resembles a corpse as she lies resting, silent and pale (F 406). The tale of Dardi Seguso, recounted by Stelio, links death and art, and adumbrates Foscarina's (possible) death. In this tale, the master glassblower Seguso attempts to build a great organ to harness the power of the Venetian lagoon – the decreed price of his failure is death by decapitation, and he wears a red thread around his neck as a reminder. His lover Perdilanza (whose name resembles Stelio's name for Foscarina, Perdita, or 'lost') feels neglected and jealous towards his artistic ambition, and throws herself into the mechanism, sabotaging the project with her suicide. Stelio jokes that he too should wear a red thread around his neck to keep him focused on his goal. The cruelty of this comment in front of Foscarina eludes him.

This tale warns of the threat that (obsessive) desire can pose to creativity. Such a threat plagues the relationship of Stelio and Foscarina, and we see that Eros' presence both drives and hinders Stelio's artistic progress. Foscarina's beauty inspires him and allows him to 'see' figures such as Persephone and Cassandra; she also provides a medium for the performance of his art. It is true, too, that Stelio's love for his muse is genuine and tender; but her insecurities and jealousies also impede Stelio, and at times force him to forsake his work, leaving him impatient and creatively frustrated. And death is an ever-present threat; the novel has even been defined as 'una lunga, straziante "morte a Venezia"'.[39]

Aschenbach's Venice is populated by (death-)figures reminiscent of the stranger in Munich: the rogue gondolier (who rows Aschenbach against his will), the singer in the troupe of travelling musicians, and even possibly the Englishman in the

[39] 'a long, torturous "Death in Venice"', Squarotti, p. 115.

travel agency are further echoes of Dionysus, menacing reminders of Aschenbach's proximity to death. They also suggest the lure of death, or of that state of Dionysian intoxication that causes loss of self-control, leading to death. Yet it is another figure that draws Aschenbach's gaze: Tadzio. This youthful picture of beauty gradually enthrals Aschenbach, who will eventually pursue the boy through the labyrinthine streets of Venice in his desperate voyeurism. Tadzio's beauty inspires Aschenbach to write one and a half pages of his most sublime prose, but here the creativity ends. After this brief period of productivity, Aschenbach, utterly distracted by Tadzio, forsakes his work and can focus only on pursuing the boy. It is during one of these chases through Venice (the city almost taunting Aschenbach by hiding Tadzio and his family[40]) that Aschenbach consumes the overripe strawberries[41] from which he contracts cholera.[42] But Aschenbach's mental disintegration is as important as his bodily sickness: struggling with his desire for Tadzio, he gradually loses self-control, acknowledges his desires with 'ich liebe dich'[43] (T 614) and embraces his destiny with a symbolic gesture of opened arms (T 602).[44] His death is but days away. Desire, then, having incited Aschenbach to a short period of artistic brilliance, drives him to his death, a death which many, such as Hannelore Mundt,[45] have identified as a form of *Liebestod*.[46]

The significance of Wagner becomes apparent once again – 'Liebestod' (signifying consummation in or after death) is the name Wagner gave to Isolde's final aria in Act III of *Tristan und Isolde* (premiered 1865), most of which was written in

[40] As Aschenbach crosses a bridge, 'die Höhe des Bogens verbarg sie dem Nachfolgenden', 'the peak of the slope hid them from the follower' (T 636).
[41] The overripe strawberries are a powerful and vivid symbol of Aschenbach's own feelings.
[42] Aschenbach has previously been warned that the food is probably contaminated (T 629).
[43] 'I love you'.
[44] Aschenbach's psychological journey from restraint and self-illusion to abandonment and death will be recounted more fully later on.
[45] Mundt, p. 95.
[46] 'love-death'.

Venice, and which concludes with the death of the lovers. Looking to Platen, who wrote extensively in Venice, we find Tristan again, as the title of a poem which begins: 'Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen, ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben.'[47] This could almost serve as a subtitle for Aschenbach's Venetian experiences. Indeed, on arriving Aschenbach thinks of the 'schwermütig-enthusiastischen Dichters [Platen], dem vormals die Kuppeln und Glockentürme seines Traumes aus diesen Fluten gestiegen waren'[48] (T 577): the beautiful sight of the city will soon help deliver him to death. A similar sentiment is echoed when Aschenbach remembers the works of Xenophon, who recounts Socrates' warning to Critobulus, namely, that merely observing a beautiful figure can drive one mad. This is surely the case with Aschenbach; a glimpse of the beauty which Tadzio represents seals his downfall and death. Tadzio and Venice mirror each other in this respect: both are fatally beautiful, and dangerous. The leitmotif of the *Liebestod* is inescapable in *Der Tod in Venedig*, and has been observed by some in Aschenbach's final moments. For example, Furness sees in the black cloth of the abandoned camera on the beach, where Aschenbach dies watching Tadzio, a visual reminder of the black flag which appears at the end of *Tristan und Isolde.*[49]

The cholera epidemic allows Mann to expand his descriptions of a decaying city. Venice's very nature provides an unsettling backdrop: a city living on borrowed time, Venice is in danger of being submerged, and the waters threaten to rot her foundations. Mann exploits this atmosphere of danger and decomposition, juxtaposing what Aschenbach sees as the ennobling of his mind (via his observation of Tadzio and

[47] 'Whoever has gazed upon beauty eye to eye / Is given over, signed and sealed, to death' (translation by Browning), August von Platen, *Tristan*, in Robert Browning, *German Poetry from 1750 to 1900* (New York: Continuum, 1984), p. 172.
[48] 'melancholy-enthusiastic poet [Platen], who had once seen the cupolas and bell-towers of his dreams rise from these waters'.
[49] Wagner, writing to Liszt, declares that he will cover himself with this black cloth to die. See Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 47.

contemplation of Beauty through him, in a parody of Neoplatonism) against a festering and rotting background. Venice's unwholesome air[50] initially repels Aschenbach, leaving him feeling ill. But an attempt to leave is hampered when his luggage is misplaced, and he returns to his hotel. On seeing Tadzio again it becomes clear why he had left the Lido so reluctantly, and why he had received the news of his lost luggage so gleefully. But whilst Aschenbach feels lighter in spirit, the stench of carbolic disinfectant grows heavier; an attempt by the city authorities to conceal the deadly disease that threatens the city.

D'Annunzio employs a similar atmosphere of decay, contrasting Stelio's ardent hopes for artistic and cultural revitalisation against crumbling *palazzi*, overgrown gardens and faded mastery. He presents Venice in autumn, a season of decomposition and decay (but which clears the way for a season of rebirth). We read of the ageing Countess of Glanegg, who is so ashamed of her withered beauty that she has become a recluse, and has destroyed all of her mirrors to escape the sight of her aged appearance. This may suggest modern society's refusal to acknowledge cultural degeneration: just as the Countess avoids confronting her fading beauty, society prefers to deny the signs of cultural decay.

Venice's deathly atmosphere, Stelio notes, even draws those seeking death, and those consumed by morbid love; to them she appears 'una clemente città di morte abbracciata da uno stagno soporifero'[51] (F 100). The image of Charon's boat bobbing on the 'acqua morta'[52] (F 9) adds to the funereal mood, as it courses through 'una landa, stigia, come una visione dell'Ade: un paese di ombre, di vapori e di acque'[53] (F 407). The island-cemetery of San Michele 'to which dead bodies were rowed in

[50] We read of the 'faul riechende Lagune' ('the reeking lagoon', T 595).
[51] 'a kindly city of death clasped in the embrace of a somniferous pool'.
[52] 'dead water'.
[53] 'a stygian land, like a vision of Hades: a country of shadows, vapours and waters'.

special mourning vessels'[54] is another potent reminder of death and decomposition. Stelio and Foscarina shiver as they pass by in their gondola on the darkened waters, and brush past 'le peate nere che marcivano lungo i muri corrosi'[55] (F 546). Death is unavoidable in D'Annunzio's Venice, and the city itself seems to be dying. The death of this once magnificent city, laden with artistic associations, and the death of Wagner, indicate a bleak vision of culture's future.

Yet D'Annunzio's hopes for art are kept alive through Stelio, and perhaps an element of decadence and death can be embraced. Foscarina, declared a great talent by Stelio due to her experience of melancholy, is often surrounded with morbid imagery. Her despondent and sad countenance comes from her nomadic experiences and deathly air; she seems to be awaiting death. This melancholy makes her an invaluable instrument for Stelio, rendering her a more capable actress, a greater inspiration, and a more powerful artistic medium.

The irresistible lure of Venice ensnares Aschenbach and Stelio, captivating them with the promise (whether false or otherwise) of artistic greatness intertwined with danger and foreboding. A sense of entrapment is evoked through the use of mazes. In Mann's Venice the streets through which Aschenbach pursues Tadzio are labyrinthine (T 596), recalling the mythical Minotaur's lair. With feverish agitation Aschenbach attempts to follow Tadzio, and is at one point overcome with anxiety, swooning at a well in a deserted piazza, trembling and sweating.[56] Similarly, in the grounds of Strà, Foscarina finds herself lost in a *labirinto*, frantically seeking Stelio, who playfully eludes her. In a later scene Foscarina, driven to distraction by insecurity, will flee and seek refuge in a deserted piazza with a well – much like Aschenbach.

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[54] Plant, p. 202.
[55] 'the boats that rotted along the decaying walls'.
[56] By this point Aschenbach has consumed the overripe strawberries (T 637).

Mann's and D'Annunzio's use of the labyrinth is just one of the myriad classical allusions with which their portrayals of Venice abound. In both cases the city is full of echoes of ancient Greece, and seems as populated with classical figures as with modern-day characters. For Stelio this renders Venice the ideal location for his artistic task, which demands a 'Wiederbelebung des antiken Mythos'.[57] This revival will enable him to offer a new tragic tradition to the modern world through an adaptation of the values of antiquity and classical tragic traditions. Hence Venice appears to Stelio (and possibly also to D'Annunzio) as a hopeful symbol despite her faded grandeur. Aschenbach invokes classical names in order to justify his experiences, and finds that his response to Tadzio in Venice requires a comparable and respectable standard, such as can only be provided by invoking names such as Socrates and Phaedrus. The many classical allusions of *Il fuoco* and *Der Tod in Venedig* will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

Observing Mann's Venice, Heller sees 'a city built by the very Will to Power in honour of Death. Teeming with Life, it is entirely Art, the residence of Eros, Thanatos, the *Liebestod*'.[58] This description seems equally applicable to D'Annunzio's Venice. This city of art appears simultaneously as a city of death, despite her beauty: she nurtures the impulses of Eros and Thanatos, which become fatally tied to art. Creativity and artistic production become bound up with desire in Venice, but in a relationship that relies on the sublimation of one by the other. Death and decay lurk menacingly in the winding streets and canals, threatening hopes for artistic revitalisation. Mann and D'Annunzio also populate their Venetian settings with copious classical figures, for the aesthetic ideals of both Aschenbach and Stelio

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[57] Elizabeth Galvan, 'Aschenbachs letztes Werk. Thomas Manns *Der Tod in Venedig* und Gabriele D'Annunzios *Il fuoco*', *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch,* 20 (2007), 261-285 (p. 264).

[58] Erich Heller, cited in Caroline Picart, *Thomas Mann and Friedrich Nietzsche*, *Eroticism, Death, Music and Laughter* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), p. 14.

involve an element of classicism. These classical allusions elucidate the protagonists' psychology and the development of their aesthetic principles in this Venetian setting, and will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter Two – Classical Allusions

Antiquity and classicism are central to the aesthetic construction of both Mann's Aschenbach and D'Annunzio's Stelio. *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco* are steeped in allusions to classical figures, symbols and icons from antiquity, and aspects of Greek tragedy. This classicism serves several functions, enriching the two texts: as shall be demonstrated, for example, allusions to figures of antiquity hint at plot developments or reveal the psychology of Mann's and D'Annunzio's characters.

For Stelio Effrena, a revival of ancient myth is the key to his aim of aestheticising his public and realising a rebirth of tragedy. Venice provides the '*genius loci* für das Entstehen eines unerhört neuen Kunstwerks aus der Wiederbelebung des antiken Mythos'.[1] This city, which so uniquely and crucially inspires the artist, is replete with symbols and characters from Greek history and legend. Many are inherently tragic in nature, drawn from Attic tragedy. Foscarina is similarly endowed with a tragic nature, often exuding the air of a tragic heroine. As will be seen, she appears transfigured into heroines of Greek tragedy (such as Cassandra), and her character seems inseparable from the melancholy figures she portrays on stage.

Aschenbach, the 'devotee of classicism',[2] has a similar reverence for the ancient Greeks, and emulates classical literature in his own writing. 'Der geduldige Künstler'[3] (T 565) writes with restraint and control, and 'ordnende Kraft und antithetische Beredsamkeit'[4] (T 565). Aschenbach's classicism, which should provide familiarity and security, ironically becomes the vehicle through which repressed

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[1] '*genius loci* for the emergence of an unprecedented and new work of art through the revival of ancient myth', Galvan, p. 264.
[2] Robertson, p. 97.
[3] 'the patient artist'.
[4] 'organised power and antithetical eloquence'.

impulses are exposed, as we observe his tendency to invoke classical figures and episodes in his increasingly enraptured interpretations of his Venetian experiences. Thus, for example, Tadzio becomes Phaedrus to his Socrates (T 607). Mann's use of a classical framework functions largely to elucidate his protagonist's psychological development through the novella. Gronicka finds that Mann's use of classical references thus 'creates a unique work of art, suspended in an unceasing tension between the poles of psychological realism and the symbolism of myth'.[5] It also illustrates the development of Aschenbach's aesthetic values, demonstrating his shift from neutral appreciation to heated fixation. Mann's invocations of ancient Greece, however, demand caution. Mann may well have intended his reader to arrive at a parodistic or ironic reading, designed to caricature Aschenbach, as will be examined.

With the general functions of the myriad classical allusions in mind, we can now examine specific antique references in the texts.

Mann's first allusion to classicism in *Der Tod in Venedig* strikes us as soon as we regard the novella's structure. The five chapters are probably a nod to the division of classical tragedies into five acts. The events of each of Mann's chapters also seems to tally with the traditional acts of the drama, as restated by Gustav Freytag: 'der erste enthält die Einleitung, der zweite die Steigerung, der dritte den Höhepunkt, der vierte die Umkehr, der fünfte die Katastrophe'.[6] This schema certainly seems applicable to Mann's novella, and we can perhaps describe Aschenbach's fatal utterance of 'Ich liebe dich!'[7] (T 614) in the fourth chapter as the 'Umkehr' (symbolising the moment at which restraint is abandoned) and his death in the fifth chapter as the 'Katastrophe'.

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[5] André von Gronicka, 'Myth Plus Psychology, A Style Analysis of *Death in Venice*', *Germanic Review*, 31 (1956), 191-205 (p. 193).

[6] 'the first comprises the exposition, the second the rising action, the third the climax, the fourth the falling action, the fifth the catastrophe', Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1863), p. 168.

[7] 'I love you!'

The positioning of Aschenbach within a novella whose structure is classically inspired sets the tone for his Venetian experiences. Struck by Tadzio's beauty, and troubled by his sensual response to the youth, Aschenbach interprets (and attempts to excuse, whether consciously or not) his experiences by superimposing a classical reading over them. The frequency with which he does this increases in direct proportion to the intensification of his obsession with Tadzio. As his desire for the boy grows, so does the number of mythical metamorphoses: immediately after Aschenbach's symbolic 'bereitwillig willkommen heißende, gelassen aufnehmende Gebärde'[8] (T 602), where he opens up his arms to embrace his fate, the narrator describes the rising of the sun as observed by Aschenbach. But now this daily event and symbol of earthly regularity has become the epic journey of 'der Gott mit den hitzigen Wangen'[9] (T 602). Even the wind is driven by 'die Rosse Poseidons'[10] (T 611). These transformations of the mundane into the mythical are therefore connected to Aschenbach's reaction to Tadzio, and the beauty that so moves the writer.

In order to ennoble and justify his obsession with Tadzio, Aschenbach turns to Plato and Plutarch, reading his experience through their ideals. In particular, turning to Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* (appropriately 'saturated'[11] with homoeroticism) he casts himself as Socrates, assuming the role of affectionate and pedagogic companion to Tadzio's Phaedrus, with Venice transfigured into the Athenian plane where they converse (T 617). But Aschenbach is a participant in a decidedly one-sided dialogue.

Aschenbach interprets Tadzio as a manifestation of beauty itself, in its original (Platonic) 'Form'. In Plato's metaphysics, Forms are 'natures existing independently of sensibles: eternal, changeless, divine [...], they are perfectly beautiful, just, etc. and

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[8] 'eagerly welcoming, calmly accepting gesture'.
[9] 'the god with the flaming cheeks'.
[10] 'the horses of Poseidon'.
[11] Herbert Lehnert and Eva Wessell (eds.), *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Mann* (New York: Camden House, 2004), p. 105.

of the highest value';[12] objects perceived sensorily, by contrast, are transient and inferior. Aschenbach therefore feels his slavish voyeurism is justified, remembering that 'nur die Schönheit ist göttlich und sichtbar zugleich, und so ist sie [...] der Weg des Künstlers zum Geiste'[13] (T 637). This teaching explains how reverent and intellectual appreciation of beauty can convey one's soul to higher realms. The sight of a truly beautiful figure reminds the onlooker of the original Form of beauty, which humans knew before birth, 'but necessarily forgot when they entered earthly existence'.[14] Aschenbach believes he is beholding 'das Schöne selbst [...], die Form als Gottesgedanken, [...] und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war'[15] (T 606).

Yet, as Robertson notes when examining the Platonic doctrine to which Aschenbach turns, 'by this stringent standard, Aschenbach's Platonism is false'.[16] The beauty he beholds does not grant intellectual or spiritual enlightenment, but rather intoxication, and feverish agitation.[17] 'Der Betrachtende'[18] (T 605) becomes 'der Verwirrte'[19] (T 619). Aschenbach's recourse to mythical allusions is revealed as an attempt to master a situation over which he is losing control. Robertson notes that 'in *Death in Venice*, "mythic" experience is shown by the sceptical narrator to be projected onto his actual experience by the increasingly enraptured Aschenbach'.[20] It is Aschenbach alone who glosses over the uncomfortable aspects of his experience with the emulsion of classicism.

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[12] Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, *From the Beginning to Plato* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 367.
[13] 'only beauty is both divine and visible at the same time, and so it is [...] the way of the artist to the soul'.
[14] Reed, 1994, p. 54.
[15] '[...] to embrace beauty itself, the Form as the thought of a god, [...] and of which a human image and allegory was here erected meekly and lightly for worship'.
[16] Robertson, p. 102.
[17] See, for example, 'Das war der Rausch' ('That was intoxication', T 606).
[18] 'the onlooker'.
[19] 'the confused one'.
[20] Robertson, p. 101.

Elements of Aschenbach's increasingly agitated response to Tadzio and his desire resemble another classical dialogue, namely Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love*, especially the *Erotikos*. Indeed, so striking a resemblance does Barberà observe that she posits this dialogue as the principal classical source to which Mann looks, rejecting the accepted view that it is Plato's dialogues on which Mann primarily draws.[21] Her argument centres around several extracts, which indeed show a startling symmetry; for example, we can compare Mann's 'Amor fürwahr tat es den Mathematikern gleich, die unfähigen Kindern greifbare Bilder der reinen Formen vorzeigen'[22] (T 606) and Plutarch's explanation of how love approaches the soul through the body, just as 'teachers of geometry' offer their students 'tangible and visible copies of spheres and cubes'.[23] In the *Erotikos* we also read that love shows us 'young men radiant in the prime of their beauty'[24] to incite us, comparable to Mann's 'So auch bediente der Gott sich, um uns das Geistige sichtbar zu machen, gern der Gestalt und Garbe menschlicher Jugend'[25] (T 606); and that, whilst 'in erotic madness',[26] one 'pursues by day and haunts the door by night'[27], echoed when Aschenbach leans his head against Tadzio's door after a fruitless and exhausting pursuit (T 619).

As well as inserting himself (and Tadzio) into these classical dialogues, Aschenbach - and Mann's narrator - also turn to specific episodes from Greek mythology. Mann's carefully chosen allusions modify the way that we interpret the relationship between Aschenbach and the object of his desire, often casting doubt on

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[21] Pau Gilabert Barberà, 'Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* or Plutarch's way towards Eros', *L'Anuari de Filologia, Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya*, 15 (1992), 25-47.
[22] 'Eros indeed mimicked the mathematicians who presented inept children with concrete images of abstract shapes'.
[23] Plutarch, *The Erotikos*, cited by Barberà, p. 13.
[24] Plutarch, cited by Barberà, p. 13.
[25] 'So, too, the god made willing use of the form and colour of human youth to make the spiritual visible'.
[26] Plutarch, cited by Barberà, p. 18.
[27] Ibid.

the notion of the spiritually enlightened relationship that Aschenbach attempts to create. In Aschenbach's eyes, Tadzio becomes Hyacinth, 'der sterben mußte, weil zwei Götter ihn liebten'[28] (T 612). According to mythology, the rivalry between Zephyr and Apollo, both besotted with the beautiful youth Hyacinth, resulted in the boy's death. Observing Hyacinth and Apollo playing, Zephyr jealously caused the wind to carry their discus, which fatally wounded Hyacinth. Alluding to this, Mann hints at the danger that lies within Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio. It is significant that Apollo is said to have 'neglected for [Hyacinth] his lyre'[29] – just as Aschenbach will neglect his artistic work to pursue Tadzio.[30] We may also remember how Aschenbach, noticing Tadzio's bad teeth[31] and signs of sickliness, realises that the boy will probably die young, and fails to explain the 'Gefühl der Genugtuung oder Beruhigung [...] das diesen Gedanken begleitete'[32] (T 595). If we attempt to account for it, perhaps we can conclude (as Heilbut has) that 'the older man need fear no posthumous rivals'[33] for Tadzio's love. Dying young would also ensure that Tadzio's beauty never faded.

Further hinting at the harmful nature of Aschenbach's desire, Mann introduces Ganymede. During his brief period of artistic production on the beach, Aschenbach, watching Tadzio, models his words on the 'Körper [...], der ihm göttlich schien'[34] (T 608), to convey the boy's beauty to a higher intellectual realm – 'wie der Adler einst

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[28] 'who had to die because two gods loved him'.
[29] Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology* (London: Octopus, 1989), p. 52.
[30] We read that 'er warf das Schreibzeug beiseite' ('he pushed his writing things aside', T 592), for example.
[31] Bad teeth are frequently used by Mann to suggest decadence indicative of overindulgence, and death. In *Buddenbrooks* we read of the sickly and decadent Hanno: 'Besonders seine Zähne hatten von jeher die Ursache von mancherlei schmerzhaften Störungen und Beschwerden ausgemacht.' ('His teeth especially had always been the cause of many excruciating disorders and afflictions.') Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1981), p. 522.
[32] 'declined to account for the feeling of gratification and calmness that accompanied these thoughts'.
[33] Anthony Heilbut, *Thomas Mann – Eros and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 254.
[34] 'body [...] that seemed to him divine'.

den troischen Hirten zum Äther trug'[35] (T 608). Here the eagle is Zeus, transfigured to kidnap the shepherd-boy Ganymede. The story of the abduction tells that Zeus was so struck by the exceptional beauty of the mortal boy, desiring him 'as his bedfellow' in addition to his cup-bearer,[36] that he carried him away to Olympus. Over time the story of Zeus and Ganymede became 'the paradigm for pederastic relationships',[37] indeed, Plato invoked the myth to 'justify his own sentimental feelings towards his pupils',[38] a strategy Aschenbach has employed.[39]

The allusion to Ganymede may not be as straightforward as it first appears, however. Van Mander describes Ganymede as 'the one least defiled by the physical uncleanness of evil desires: the part chosen by God and drawn up to him'.[40] This led to the association of Ganymede with 'children dying young'.[41] It may also be significant that 'Renaissance humanists saw the theme as an allegory for the progress of the human soul towards Christ',[42] interpreting Ganymede's ascent as a spiritual or intellectual one. The juxtaposition of these two interpretations – the ascent of the mind, conveyed through beauty, against Zeus' kidnap of a youth for physical gratification – can perhaps be overlaid onto Aschenbach's psychology. Whilst believing himself to be privy to, and responding towards, a source of spiritual nourishment and enlightenment, his desires ultimately have a more sensual character.

This sensual aspect is hinted at by frequent allusions to Eros, the deity of erotic love. Immediately seeing Tadzio's countenance as divine, Aschenbach's first

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[35] 'as the eagle had carried the Trojan shepherd through the air'.
[36] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: The Folio Society, 1996), p. 115.
[37] See Alastair Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and Love from Antiquity to Modernity* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), p. 131.
[38] Graves, p. 117.
[39] To the same purpose, Mann also invokes 'die Göttin [...], die Jünglingsentführerein' ('the goddess, [...], the boy-abductor', T 611), referring to the kidnap of Cleitos and Cephalos by Eos.
[40] Van Mander, cited in Peter Schoon et al., *Greek Gods and Heroes in the Age of Rubens and Rembrandt* (Athens and Dordrecht: National Gallery/Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 2000), p. 250.
[41] Schoon et al., p. 250.
[42] Irene Earls, *Renaissance Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 124.

detailed appreciation of the boy likens 'die wahrhaft gottähnliche Schönheit des Menschenkindes'[43] (T 589) to 'das Haupt von Eros'[44] (T 589). Tadzio appears to him as the very personification of desire; when Eros later becomes Aschenbach's master[45] we understand that it is Tadzio he follows. Mann's notes describing Eros could apply equally to Tadzio: '*Eros ist*: jung und von zarter Bildung, geschmeidig, ebenmäßig u. von schöner Haltung.'[46] Aschenbach muses over the service Eros performs for the artist, allowing for a higher contemplation of beauty, claiming that 'wir Dichter den Weg der Schönheit nicht gehen können, ohne daß Eros sich zugesellt und sich zum Führer aufwirft'[47] (T 638). If Tadzio is Eros, then Aschenbach hopes that he will guide him thus. But Eros is associated with *erotic* love and desire; Heilbut considers Tadzio 'an erotic figure, though not a pornographic one',[48] and notes the violence with which Eros is also associated (especially for Mann), reflected in the fact that 'whenever Tadzio's older friend assaults him it borders on rape'.[49] The sensual and violent elements of Eros, which Aschenbach (perhaps consciously) ignores, are exposed by the deity's classical connotations: 'the early Greeks pictured him as a *Ker*, or winged "Spite", like Old Age, or Plague, in the sense that uncontrolled sexual passion could be disturbing to ordered society'.[50] Worship of Eros focused on his erotic nature, and he was often worshipped 'as a simple phallic pillar'.[51] Perhaps this is the pillar we find surrounded by the inebriated *Bacchae* in Aschenbach's dream

[43] 'the truly divine beauty of the human child'.
[44] 'the head of Eros'.
[45] 'Eros, der sich seiner bemeistert' ('Eros, who had mastered over him', T 620)
[46] 'Eros is: young and of gentle breeding, smooth, well-proportioned and of beautiful countenance', Ehrhard Bahr, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente – Thomas Mann, Der Tod in Venedig* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), p. 107.
[47] 'We poets cannot take the path of beauty unless Eros accompanies us and becomes our leader'.
[48] Heilbut, p. 253.
[49] Ibid., p. 251.
[50] Graves, p. 62.
[51] Ibid.

(which will be examined in greater detail below). Once again, Mann employs a classical figure to illuminate his protagonist's psychological state.

Given their exchange of letters, it is likely that Mann was aware of the work of Sigmund Freud and the significance of Eros to the psychologist: 'Freud saw Eros [...] as a social binding-agent, feeding the appetite for construction. But he also sensed the destructive potential of its symbolic exchange with Thanatos (a personification of death) in a yin-and-yang process.'[52] According to Freud, who juxtaposed the life instinct (Eros) with the death instinct (Thanatos), 'instinctual impulses are frustrated in the individual [...], by cultural ideals that society imposes'.[53] Such repression causes aggression and guilt. This may be so with Aschenbach, whose death by cholera 'may be punishment that [Mann] imposes, or that [he] metes out, for his forbidden wishes'.[54] The repression of Aschenbach's erotic desires could also indicate wider 'collective cultural malaise',[55] where his death warns against the repression society demands.

Mann's use of classical allusions to expose Aschenbach's psychology is probably most famous in his use of Apollo and Dionysus, whose struggle is internalised in Aschenbach. These two figures appear in both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco* in a form that strongly resembles the twin 'Kunsttriebe'[56] of Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872). In this text Nietzsche posits 'dass die Fortentwickelung der Kunst an die Duplicität des Apollinischen und des

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[52] Dominic Pettman, *After the Orgy: Towards a Politics of Exhaustion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 6. Freud only actually employed the figures of Eros and Thanatos after the publication of *Der Tod in Venedig*, the concepts to which he attached these names were constant phenomena in his studies, present in works preceding Mann's novella.
[53] Ellis Shookman, *Thomas Mann's Death in Venice: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood, 2004), p. 102.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] 'artistic impulses', Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik)*, § 12.

Dionysischen gebunden ist'.[57] As psychological impulses, the Apollinian (after the god of light and poetry) tends towards restraint and clarity, whilst the Dionysian is characterised by intoxication, loss of control, and excess. The two impulses oppose and balance each other, and the sublimation of one by the other ensures that neither triumphs definitively. Where the balance tips in favour of the Apollinian drive, an art form that is overly Apollinian will result – such as sculpture or epic poetry; an excess of the Dionysian impulse results in a distinctly Dionysian art form, such as music.[58] The zenith of art[59] was marked when the two impulses 'mit einander gepaart erscheinen und in dieser Paarung zuletzt das ebenso dionysische als apollinische Kunstwerk der attischen Tragödie erzeugen'.[60]

Mann depicts Aschenbach's gradual departure from a strictly Apollinian existence towards Dionysian delirium. The description of Aschenbach's former monastic routine, combined with the restrained and classical nature of his earlier literature, presents an excessively Apollinian figure. He has 'entered into a covenant with Apollo',[61] but in Venice, he 'unwittingly goes out in search of Dionysus and dies in his embrace'.[62] The artist has 'nur so gelebt – und der Sprecher schloß die Finger seiner Linken fest zur Faust - ; niemals *so* – und er ließ die geöffnete Hand bequem von der Lehne des Sessels hängen'[63] (T 566). But with the gesture that closes chapter

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[57] 'that the advancement of art is tied to the duality of the Apollinian and the Dionysian.' Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik)*, § 1.
[58] It is important to note that Apollinian music also exists (and would be characterised by structure and suggestion), but that, for Nietzsche, music best allows for expression of the Dionysian impulse.
[59] At least, according to Nietzsche.
[60] 'appear paired together and, as this pair, finally produce that artwork which is equally Dionysian and Apollinian, the Attic tragedy', Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 1. The sexuality with which Nietzsche describes this union ('erzeugen', 'procreate') highlights the link between eroticism and art, evident in both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco*.
[61] Erich Heller, *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 105.
[62] Ibid.
[63] 'only ever lived so – and here the speaker closed the fingers of his left hand tightly into a fist -; never *so* – and here he let his hand drop open and hang comfortably from the armrest of his chair'.

three (T 602), and his posture as he utters 'ich liebe dich!'[64] he seems released from self-control: he has gradually succumbed to 'der fremde Gott [Dionysus]'[65] (T 632). Aschenbach has journeyed from one psychological extreme to the other.

The climax of Aschenbach's embrace of Dionysus comes in his dream of chapter five, shortly after his fateful exclamation of 'ich liebe dich!'[66] (T 614). In this dream Aschenbach witnesses the Maenads (or *Bacchae* in the Roman tradition, following Bacchus) in their ritualistic worship of Dionysus, of whom Aschenbach too has become a follower. Dionysus' enraptured initiates engaged in orgiastic or ritualistic worship, depicted in *The Bacchae* of Euripides.[67]

Erwin Rohde[68] described the Bacchic rituals in his *Psyche* (1898), in a passage which is strongly echoed in Aschenbach's dream of chapter five. In both Rohde's and Mann's descriptions we find worshippers playing flutes, carrying snakes and torches, dancing with their hair blowing wildly. Rohde describes how 'with their teeth they seized the bleeding flesh and devoured it raw',[69] mirrored in Mann's '...als sie reißend und mordend sich auf die Tiere hinwarfen und dampfende Fetzen verschlangen'[70] (T 633). Mann's use of this vivid scene graphically illustrates Aschenbach's irreversible descent into Dionysian intoxication. His previous resistance to Dionysian impulses creates a parallel with the 'ill-fated Pentheus',[71] further elucidating Aschenbach's psychological development. Euripides is 'particularly concerned with the

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[64] Aschenbach is 'zurückgelehnt, mit hängendem Armen' ('leaning back, with arms hanging', T 614).
[65] 'the stranger god'.
[66] 'I love you!'
[67] In this tragedy Pentheus (the young king of Thebes) forbids the worship of Dionysus, who exacts a gruesome revenge by persuading the king to go to Mount Cithaeron and observe the Bacchae performing their ritual of *sparagmos*. This practice involved the 'tearing apart, limb from limb, of a sacrificial victim' (as explained by William Storm, *After Dionysus: a theory of the tragic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 27), often an animal, whilst in a frenzied state of ecstasy; the animal's flesh would often then be confumed, still raw. Tricked into interrupting their ritual, Pentheus is torn apart by the blindly intoxicated worshippers.
[68] Rohde was also a close friend of Nietzsche's.
[69] Rohde, cited in Shookman, 2003, p. 83.
[70] 'as they threw themselves raging and murderously upon the animals and swallowed steaming scraps'.
[71] Shookman, 2003, p. 152.

disintegration of personality, perhaps nowhere more graphically represented than in the physical dismemberment of Pentheus in *The Bacchae*'.[72] Picart sees Mount Cithaeron as 'unnamed yet referred to at many levels, through Aschenbach's fevered dream'[73]: perhaps just as Pentheus was lured to Mount Cithaeron and the orgiastic revelry by Dionysus, so Aschenbach has been enticed to Venice, and, dreaming, finds himself witnessing the same scenes of orgiastic celebration[74] which, for Pentheus, ended in physical dismemberment. For Aschenbach this bacchanalian dream marks the final disintegration of his previous ordered and restrained character – resulting in his psychological dismemberment.

Another key function of Mann's classical allusions is to foreshadow the fate awaiting his protagonist at the end of the novella. The reader has been prepared for Aschenbach's demise by the narrator's subtle hints and carefully placed allusions to ill-fated heroes of antiquity. Arriving in Venice, Aschenbach transfers himself to a coffin-like gondola, reminscent of the boat of Charon, who conveyed the souls of the dead across the river Styx to the Underworld: here Aschenbach becomes Charon's passenger, as it were. He finds himself being rowed against his will, but offers only a brief initial protest. His willing submission to this 'Charon' secures his delivery into a sinister realm.

On one occasion we are given reason to imagine that it is not for the hellish Underworld that Aschenbach will depart, but rather for a hero's Paradise. Likening Aschenbach to a Greek hero and Venice to the mythical afterlife, Mann describes how Aschenbach feels he is 'entrückt ins elysische Land'[75] (T 603). Just as Venice sits on

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[72] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 162.
[73] Picart, p. 17.
[74] In his dream, Aschenbach observes the worshippers in a 'Bergland' ('mountainous region', T 632), reminiscent of Mount Cithaeron.
[75] 'enraptured in the Elysian Lands'.

the coast, so this afterlife of the blessed and heroic is located at the edge of the world. Perhaps, then, Aschenbach's death could be a rewarding release; or perhaps a more parodistic reading should be taken. Aschenbach deludes himself that he is achieving the kind of spiritual enlightenment that Plato described, and this Elysian experience seems another illusion. We must remember that this transfiguration of Venice into Elysium occurs when Aschenbach is lulled into a bewitching inertia by Venice and his routine observations of Tadzio.[76] Venice relaxes Aschenbach as nowhere else can – but there is something sinister in this power. The seductive comfort of the gondola seat appears again, and we find Aschenbach 'gelehnt in die Kissen der Gondel, die ihn vom Markusplatz, [...] unter dem groß gestirnten Himmel heimwärts zum Lido führte'[77] (T 603). He is *passively* ferried across the waters, helpless (and seemingly disinclined) to resist this 'boatman of the Underworld', just as he had only half-heartedly protested at the rogue gondolier: 'like his health, his will is increasingly weak',[78] and this weakness of will, along with his fatigue mentioned in the opening paragraphs of the novella (T 559), indicates decadence. Aschenbach is no helpless victim, but a willing one.

The inescapability of Aschenbach's fate is illustrated by a symbolic allusion to Persephone, who was kidnapped by Hades and taken to the Underworld to become his bride. In his dominion she was tricked into consuming six pomegranate seeds,[79] which henceforth doomed her to spend half of every year in the realm of the dead. Whilst watching the street-musicians Aschenbach sips from a ruby-red 'Gemisch aus

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[76] Mann describes how 'der wohlige Gleichtakt dieses Daseins hatte ihn schon in seinem Bann gezogen' ('the pleasant regularity of his life had cast a spell over him', T 603).
[77] 'leaning against the cushions of the gondola, which carried him homewards from St Mark's Square, [...] under the starry sky towards the Lido'
[78] Shookman, 2004, p. 95.
[79] The number of seeds eaten by Persephone varies according to the version of the myth, with the amount of seeds consumed generally corresponding to the months Persephone had to spend in the Underworld annually.

Granatapfelsaft und Soda'[80] (T 622); perhaps Aschenbach, too, has sealed his fate, mirroring Persephone's fateful consumption. The chronological placement of this incident is significant, appearing in the fifth chapter: by this time Aschenbach has fatefully uttered 'ich liebe dich' and will soon consume (for the second time) 'Erdbeeren, überreife'[81] (T 637), another 'forbidden fruit' akin to Persephone's pomegranate seeds.

The 'forbidden fruit' consumed by Aschenbach causes him to contract cholera, providing the literal explanation for his death. Yet the reasons for Aschenbach's demise are more complex, including the crippling aspect of his love for Tadzio. Having given a harmful colour to Aschenbach's feelings towards the boy through invocations of Hyacinth and Ganymede, Mann also hints that the lover himself may be in danger. In likening Tadzio's smile (his only real reaction to Aschenbach), to 'das Lächeln des Narziß'[82] (T 614), Mann signals that Aschenbach may be treated just as cruelly as Echo, Narcissus' ill-fated lover. Having angered the gods, Narcissus was condemned to fall in love with his own reflection, leaving him ignorant to the advances of Echo, who could speak only in echo of another's utterance. Despairing and heartbroken, 'she spent the rest of her life in lonely glens, pining away for love and mortification, until only her voice remained'.[83] If Tadzio's smile has the same lethal effect on Aschenbach, all that will remain is the writer's echo, in the form of his last work, written in Tadzio's presence. Given the length of this treatise (just one and a half pages), the echo will be relatively weak.

[80] 'a mixture of pomegranate juice and soda'.
[81] 'overripe strawberries'.
[82] 'the smile of Narcissus'.
[83] Graves, p. 268.

The connection between Tadzio and Aschenbach's death is made even stronger just before Aschenbach dies, as he observes the boy against the sea.[84] Aschenbach's sees 'der bleiche und leibliche Psychagog'[85] (T 641), an implicit reference to Hermes. Tadzio becomes he who would guide souls to the Underworld, and we do not expect Mann's protagonist to have the power or will to resist; and indeed, 'wie so oft, machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen'[86] (T 641).

If Tadzio guides Aschenbach to the Underworld, it is his youthful beauty that has lured the writer. We have seen how Aschenbach has attempted to ennoble his response to Tadzio through classical allusions, and how, ultimately, his visceral response to Tadzio's beauty has guaranteed his doom. The Aschenbach to whom we are introduced is said to have 'achieved in earnest the classical style befitting a conqueror of the abyss',[87] but in Tadzio's presence he faces an unconquerable abyss. He fails to sublimate his desires through art, and is overwhelmed by the Dionysian impulses he had mastered in his Apollinian existence. Mann's use of a classical style, mirroring that of his protagonist, could therefore be interpreted as a parodistic device. Aschenbach does not triumph as a Greek hero. He dies a sweating, quivering wreck, slumped pathetically in a deck chair. His creativity ends with that brief essay written at the beach several days before, the final point at which he was able to control and channel his desire.

Many of the classical allusions in *Der Tod in Venedig* are to be found, too, in the Venice of D'Annunzio's *Il fuoco*. The classicism underpinning Aschenbach's aesthetic values is shared by Stelio, who looks to the tragic traditions of antiquity in his search for a new, modern tragedy. In contrast to the previous habits of Mann's

[84] 'dort draußen im Meere, im Winde, vorm Nebelhaft-Grenzenlosen' ('out there in the sea, in the wind, against the misty boundlessness', T 640).
[85] 'the pale and corporeal psychagogue'.
[86] 'as so often, he followed him'.
[87] Heller, E., p. 99.

protagonist, however, in *Il fuoco* D'Annunzio produces 'una classicità non più levigata e frigida, [...], ma febbrilmente scossa dall'eterna dialettica tra Dioniso e Apollo, additata da Nietzsche'.[88] Following D'Annunzio's reading of Nietzsche, a 'recovery of primal Dionysian energies'[89] is crucial to a revitalisation of art in *Il fuoco*. Thus we encounter repeated incidents of intoxication: the fervour of artistic stimulation and that of sexual excitement are blurred (often through a mythicisation of these processes), and Dionysus appears as a constant elemental presence.

For Stelio, and D'Annunzio, the importance of the ancient Greeks is indisputable. D'Annunzio himself made a pilgrimage to Greece in 1895[90] and his accounts claim that it was during this trip that he felt moved to write a modern tragedy (a task he passes on to Stelio[91]). He resolved to do this under the influence of the Greeks, prompted by re-readings of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The absence of the third member of the 'trio of tragedians',[92] Euripides, is notable: Witt suggests that D'Annunzio, who 'never hid the fact that he chose Friedrich Nietzsche as master and guide in his exploration of the Hellenic world',[93] was swayed by Nietzsche's famous lambasting of Euripides in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.[94] Indeed, D'Annunzio's incorporation of the ancient Greeks into his aesthetic principles seems largely to echo their treatment by Nietzsche, and D'Annunzio's annotations of Nietzsche's texts reveal a familiarity with, and admiration for, aspects of his legacy. D'Annunzio seems

[88] 'a classicism no longer smooth and cold, [...] but feverishly shaken by the eternal dialectic between Dionysus and Apollo, held up by Nietzsche', Pietro Gibellini, introduction to *Il fuoco* (Milan: BUR, 2008), p. 3.
[89] Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in France and Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 39.
[90] Mario Moroni and Luca Somigli, *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture Between Decadentism and Avant-Garde* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), p. 90.
[91] Witt notes that D'Annunzio, just like his protagonist, 'approached the problem of creating modern tragedy', 2001, p. 39.
[92] Ibid., p. 74.
[93] Witt, 2001, p. 74.
[94] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik)*, § 11 and 12.

to have agreed 'dass die Griechen unsere und jegliche Cultur als Wagenlenker in den Händen haben'.[95]

In his novel of 1895, *Le vergini delle rocce*,[96] D'Annunzio extols the need to give oneself 'uno stile di vita',[97] echoing Nietzsche's declaration that 'Eins ist Noth. – Seinem Character "Stil geben" – eine grosse und seltene Kunst!'[98] D'Annunzio's ideal 'style of life' is defined along lines which affirm 'una volta per tutte il carattere esemplare, atemporale, in una parola mitico, che la civiltà greca assume nel contesto dell'arte dannunziana'.[99] The relevance of the Greeks in D'Annunzio's view of art is constantly reiterated in *Il fuoco*, where we find a 'linea di riesumazione dell'antico'[100] via Stelio Effrena's recourse to Greek tragedy and myth to express his own aesthetic. Myth is paramount to Stelio's artistic ambitions: 'bisognerebbe, [...] che il mito si rinnovasse perché ci fosse dato di create l'arte nuova'[101] (F 279). Such a revival is necessary, and the same tragic heroes who populated the ancient stage must appear in some form, in this new tradition; for D'Annunzio the ancient Greeks represent 'la globalità dell'esperienza artistica'.[102]

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[95] 'that the Greeks have the reins, as the charioteers of our culture and every other', Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 15. D'Annunzio also seems to have accepted Nietzsche's idea that 'nur von den Griechen gelernt werden kann, was ein solches wundergleiches plötzliches Aufwachen der Tragödie für den innersten Lebensgrund eines Volkes zu bedeuten hat' ('only from the Greeks do we learn what such a miraculously sudden awakening of tragedy means for the inner basis of life of a people'), Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 21.

[96] 'The Virgins of the Rocks'.

[97] 'a style of life', Maria Teresa Marabini Moevs, *Gabriele D'Annunzio e le estetiche della fine del secolo* (L'Aquila: L. U. Japadre, 1976), p. 23.

[98] 'One thing is necessary – to "give style" to one's character – a great and rare art!' Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wssenschaft* IV, § 290.

[99] 'once and for all the exemplary character, atemporal, in a mythical word, that Greek civilization assumes in the context of D'Annunzio's art', Moevs, p. 23.

[100] 'a line of resurrection of antiquity', Concetta Assenza and Benedetto Passannanti, *Musica, storia, cultura ed educazione. Riflessioni e proposte per la scuola superiore* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001), p. 175.

[101] 'Myth must be made new, [...] so that a new form of art can be created'.

[102] 'in the aesthetic of D'Annunzio, to represent the globality of the artistic experience', Moevs, p. 56.

Stelio's search for a modern tragedy leads to the epiphany of *La vittoria dell'uomo*,[103] which corresponds to D'Annunzio's *La città morta*[104] (1898). This play centres on the archaeological excavations of Mycenae, where 'the ancient and the modern come together [...] in the exhumed corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra'.[105] Through modern-day characters, D'Annunzio engages in 'reanimating the primordial spirit of Greek tragedy',[106] bridging antiquity and modernity. In Stelio's *La vittoria dell'uomo,* Foscarina will play a character who mirrors one of *La città morta*'s protagonists, the blind seer Anna. In a moment of creative fervour Foscarina 'becomes' Stelio's tragic heroine, and collaboratively they give birth to this character: 'Pareva ch'ella ripetesse parole a lei suggerite da un genio misterioso; mentre pareva al poeta, nell'intenderle, ch'egli medesimo fosse per proforerirle'[107] (F 483). So potent is this process that Stelio 'sees' his heroine (F 478). This transfiguration has been preceded by similar episodes in which Foscarina appears as a character from a classical tragedy or Greek mythology. Foscarina's value for Stelio lies in her ability to inhabit the role of ancient Greek figures, stimulate his creativity, and participate in processes of collaborative creation. As an actress she transmits his words to his audience, functioning as 'lo strumento mirabile'[108] (F 95).

The few details given about Foscarina's previous life portray a wandering, melancholy woman, whose artistic prowess has not brought her joy and happiness, but has left her a 'donna solitaria e nomade'[109] (F 46). In her nomadic tendencies, she mirrors Io, doomed to wander the earth. Her inherent tragic nature and melancholic

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[103] 'The Victory of Man'.
[104] 'The Dead City'.
[105] James Nikopoulos, 'The Spirit of Chorus in D'Annunzio's *La città morta*', *Comparative Drama*, 44 (2010), 155-178, (p. 168).
[106] Ibid.
[107] 'it seemed that she were repeating words suggested to her by a mysterious spirit; whilst it seemed to the poet, hearing them, that he himself were about to suggest them'.
[108] 'the marvellous instrument'.
[109] 'solitary and nomadic woman'.

experiences endow her with greater talent as an actress, and therefore greater value as Stelio's instrument.[110] Foscarina can become a believable tragic heroine on the stage, because it is a role that resembles her own character. Within her Stelio finds 'la fedeltà eroica di Antigone, il furore fatidico di Cassandra [...], il sacrifizio d'Ifigenia'[111] (F 151). At various points in the novel, these characteristics surge forth and overwhelm Foscarina's character; she momentarily 'becomes' one of those heroines, ripe for insertion into her lover's work.

At the first mention of the pomegranate, Foscarina remembers Persephone, whose presence is implied in *Der Tod in Venedig* as Aschenbach drinks his pomegranate juice. Hades' words to his unwilling bride enter her mouth, as enacted in the Eleusinian mysteries. Recalling the scene where Persephone is about to throw herself into Mount Erebus, Stelio exclaims that 'il suo volto somiglia al vostro quando s'oscura'[112] (F 21). As she stands beneath a pomegranate tree after Stelio's speech, enraptured by her lover's oration, he asks himself, 'chi era ella? Persefone signora delle ombre?'[113] (F 197). The distinction between the actress and the characters she portrays dissolves as her very personality bleeds into the tragic heroines whose roles she inhabits.

Similarly, Foscarina ('la Tragica',[114] F 481) also appears possessed by the spirit of Cassandra, to whom Apollo, struck by her beauty, granted the gift of prophecy. Her punishment for not reciprocating Apollo's love was that no-one should believe her prophecies, for which she sometimes appears as a symbol of

[110] 'così la Vita e l'Arte, il passato irrevocabile e l'eternamente presente, la facevano profonda, multanime e misteriosa; magnificavano oltre i limiti umani le sue sorti ambigue' ('so Life and Art, the irrevocable past and the eternal present, had made her profound, many-souled and mysterious; her ambiguous fates had been magnified beyond human limits', F 154).
[111] 'the heroic faith of Antigone, the fateful fury of Cassandra, [...] the sacrifice of Iphigenia'.
[112] 'her face resembles yours when the shadows darken it'. Stelio finds that Foscarina wears Persephone's 'cupa maschera tragica' ('gloomy tragic mask', F 22).
[113] 'who was she? Persephone, lady of the shadows?'
[114] 'the Tragic One'.

'powerlessness',[115] whilst being endowed with profound understanding. Elements of Cassandra's character are present in the heroine of Stelio's play, and as he sees Foscarina become his heroine, he compels her to incorporate these elements into her *dramatis personae*: 'tu devi evocare Cassandra dal suo sonno [...]. Bisogna che la tua anima viva tocchi l'anima antica e si confonda con quella e faccia un'anima sola'[116] (F 480). Although this is a process of collaborative creation, it is Stelio who drives it ('io t'ho creata!'[117] F 478), and the actress becomes 'una materia ardente e duttile'[118] (F 481) in his hands. Perhaps in this too she resembles Cassandra: while gifted with a great power and knowledge as a prophet, the curse that her prophecies should go unheeded ultimately renders her helpless, just as Foscarina is subject to the creative will of her artist, who will harness her theatrical talents as a tool for his art.

Donatella Arvale, whose artistic talent and virginal beauty attracts Stelio, undergoes a similar process of mythical transformation at his hands. Captivated by her performance, Stelio exclaims, '"Arianna!" [...] come per risvegliarla'[119] (F 163), and henceforth will use this name for Donatella. Her association with the mythical labyrinth becomes significant when Stelio playfully eludes Foscarina in a maze. Imagining himself as Theseus chasing the Minotaur, he senses Ariadne, calling out, 'Arianna, il filo!'[120] (F 397), alluding to the assistance Theseus received from her in defeating the beast. For Stelio (just as for Aschenbach), classical mythology and modern reality blend together, leaving Foscarina confused and jealously agitated – is it Ariadne or Donatella he sees and desires? Her jealousy is exacerbated by Stelio's

[115] Laura McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959) p. 96.
[116] 'you must awaken Cassandra from her sleep [...]. Your living soul must touch her ancient soul and mix with it to create a single soul'.
[117] 'I have created you!'
[118] 'a burning and malleable material'.
[119] 'Ariadne! [...] as if to reawaken her'.
[120] 'Ariadne, the thread!'

wish to incorporate Donatella's art into his tragedy; Donatella will appear as part of 'la Trinità dionisiaca'[121] (F 204), accompanied by Foscarina and the dancer, La Tanagra. Her assimilation with Ariadne (notably the bride of Dionysus) in Stelio's mind, and the sublime quality of her voice, seem to qualify her for this role. It is Foscarina, however, who most nourishes his creative impulses.

As an artistic medium (an actress) with an inherently melancholic nature, Foscarina can convey tragedy to both Stelio, the artist, and to her audience. We have seen how she becomes an artistic implement and even a raw material to be fashioned into the shape of a tragic heroine. Occasionally she also appears as the finished work of art – beauty made manifest through sculpture. Just as Aschenbach appreciates Tadzio's anatomy as one might observe a classical statue, so Foscarina also appears as a marble figure. Reassuring Foscarina that her silent presence during Stelio's speech equalled both the orator's eloquence and the musicality of Donatella's performance afterwards, Daniele Glauro exclaims that 'voi avete scolpito divinamente nel silenzio la vostra propria statua'[122] (F 150). When performing she often mimics the pose of a statue, but even off-stage she appears statuesque: 'tutto il suo volto si fece di marmo'[123] (F 482). The imagery of statuary is prominent: Donatella's father is a renowned sculptor, and countless statues populate the Venetian setting. Fleischer calls the statue 'perhaps the most pervasive emblem for the body in D'Annunzio's work',[124] noting that the 'idealised representation of the human body is generally agreed to be antique statuary'[125]. When she appears throbbing with life in the midst of

[121] 'the Dionysian Trinity'.
[122] 'you sculpted your own statue divinely, in silence'.
[123] 'your whole face made itself marble'.
[124] Mary Fleischer, *Embodied Texts: Symbolist Playwright-Dancer Collaborations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 25.
[125] Ibid.

creative fervour, Foscarina becomes a heroine of Attic tragedy; when statuesque, she embodies idealised, classical beauty.

Returning to Nietzsche's pervasive presence in D'Annunzio's text, we see that sculpture is associated with Apollo, as 'der Gott aller bildnerischen Kräfte':[126] perhaps this is where Apollo asserts his presence in *Il fuoco* – although D'Annunzio undeniably allows Dionysus the greater voice. As the most frequently invoked classical allusion, Dionysus is ever-present in D'Annunzio's Venice, as a mythological figure and a psychological impulse. As in *Der Tod in Venedig*, Dionysus seems to resemble strongly that of Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, appearing as an impulse towards inebriation, ritualistic worship and loss of control.[127] An understanding and an embrace of Dionysus is crucial for D'Annunzio; 'Dioniso liberatore'[128] (F 116) holds the key to a reawakening of tragedy (and art in general), and intoxication along (Nietzschean-)Dionysian lines can be observed whenever episodes of heightened artistic creativity occur. In the clamorous applause and roar of admiration that follows Stelio's speech, his listeners 'esalavano essi la loro ebrietà nel grido verso colui che aveva offerto alle loro labbra sitibonde la coppa del suo vino'[129] (F 111). The delirium continues as a Bacchic chorus arises,[130] and it seems that 'il delirio dionisiaco, memore delle antiche selve arse nelle notti sacre, avesse dato il segnale dell'incendio in cui doveva risplendere ultimamente la bellezza di Venezia'[131] (F 125). Daniele Glauro comments that, at least for a few hours, the rhythm of art and

[126] 'the god of all plastic arts', Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 1.
[127] Indeed, both Mann and D'Annunzio were very familiar with Nietzsche's interpretations of antiquity and classicism, and a trace of this familiarity is evident in *Der Tod and Venedig* and *Il fuoco*, constituting a further crucial link between the two texts (as demonstrated).
[128] 'Dionysus the liberator'.
[129] 'they breathed out their drunkenness in their shout towards he who had offered to their parched lips the cup of his own wine'.
[130] 'l'antica ebrietà dionisiaca pareva risorgere e diffondersi da quel Coro divino' ('the ancient Dionysian delirium, seemed to rise and spread itself through that divine Chorus', F 115).
[131] 'that in that moment the Dionysian delirium, recalling the burning of ancient woods on sacred nights, had given the signal for the conflagration in which the beauty of Venice could be gloriously resplendent'.

the pulse of life have beaten together once again in Venice (F 149), and we sense that Stelio's artistic project may come to fruition in this city of art. As the chorus reaches a climactic pitch, accompanied by a surge of blended sounds, 'le Menadi parevano gridar quivi, [...] con le chiome effuse, con le vesti discinte, percotendo i cembali, agitando i crotali'[132] (F 116). This frenzy recalls not only Aschenbach's dream but also Rohde's (and Nietzsche's) descriptions of Dionysian worship. Later, Foscarina, instrument of creativity and 'donna dionisiaca'[133] (F 151), will even be described as 'palpitante come la Menade dopo la danza'[134] (F 189); she appears thus to Stelio when the two are consumed by carnal lust, desiring each other but fearful of the consequences of consummation for their artistic relationship.[135] Through such descriptions D'Annunzio blurs the intoxication caused by creativity and that caused by sexual desire.

As Stelio's creative collaborator and sexual partner, Foscarina seems to represent artistic fertility for him, instrumental in bringing forth his artistic progeny. The actress, who 'con l'atto di vita coronava il rito misterioso come nell'Orgia'[136] (F189) is vital to Stelio's artistic project. Just like Dionysian worship, 'il drama è un rito'[137] (F 172), born of the Dithyramb (the hymn to Dionysus); and Foscarina's association with the Maenads and their ritualistic or orgiastic impulses, makes her a crucial element of Stelio's tragedy. She has 'ritrovato il senso dionisiaco della natura naturante, l'antico fervore delle energie istintive e creatrici'[138] (F 336). The conception of Stelio's *drama* will require an incorporation of the ancient rituals

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[132] 'the Maenads seemed to cry out then, [...] with their hair streaming, with their scant clothes, smiting their cymbals, shaking their vipers'.
[133] 'Dionysian woman'.
[134] 'panting like the Maenad after the dance'.
[135] The complexities of the union of Stelio and Foscarina, and the implications of their relationship upon art, will be examined in a successive chapter.
[136] 'with the act of life crowned the mysterious rite as in Orgy'.
[137] 'the drama is a rite'.
[138] 'rediscovered the Dionysian sense of nature, the ancient fervour of instinctive and creative energies'.

surrounding Dionysian worship, and Foscarina, with her powers of fertility and revelation, will aid in this.[139] Foscarina is also a figure of melancholy, suffering and passion, rendering her so valuable to Stelio in his search for a revival of tragedy, for it enhances her acting ability and makes her more Dionysian. For Nietzsche, 'die Tragödie sitzt inmitten [eines] Ueberflusses an Leben, Leid und Lust':[140] Foscarina seems to have internalised the suffering and melancholy that lie at the heart of 'das dionysische Leben',[141] which in turn is vital to 'die Wiedergeburt der Tragödie'.[142] The resemblance between Nietzsche's exaltation of the Dionysian experience of suffering as inherent to tragedy, and D'Annunzio's own statements on the relationship, is striking.

We have seen how Stelio effects a metamorphosis of Foscarina and Donatella into classical heroines, who will assist in the birth of his modern tragedy. This mythicisation is extended even to his own character; but rather than drawing on an existing figure, he creates himself based on the model of Greek mythology. He adopts the pomegranate as his symbol,[143] which carries connotations of the myth of Persephone, as already examined above. He sees an affinity between himself, his work, and the fruit, declaring that 'io ho veramente rinnovellato un antico mito trasfonendomi, [...] in una forma della Natura eterna'[144] (F 26). The fruit comes to represent the absolute accord between his life and his work, in which he has obeyed the laws of his own nature. Just as ancient painters depicted Hyacinth, Narcissus and Ciparissus with their symbolic objects, so they would have portrayed Stelio with his

[139] Stelio 'appropriates the biological productivity of the human female when he describes himself as "pregnant" with his tragedy', Jessica Otey, 'D'Annunzio, Eros and the Modern Artist: Tragedy and Tragic Criticism Reconsidered', *MLN*, 125 (2010), 169-194 (p. 178).
[140] 'Tragedy sits amidst [an] abundance of life, suffering and desire', Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 20.
[141] 'the Dionysian life', Ibid.
[142] 'the Rebirth of Tragedy', Ibid.
[143] *Il fuoco* is even subtitled 'I romanzi del melagrano' ('The novels of the pomegranate').
[144] 'I have truly renewed an ancient myth, transforming myself, [...] into a form of eternal Nature'.

pomegranate (F 25). The tree becomes especially significant in a scene following Stelio's speech, where the two lovers quiver with carnal lust but are tormented by the fear of the consequences of consummating their desire.[145] Their violent embrace shakes a ripe pomegranate from its branch, which bursts open on the ground, spilling its jewel-like seeds. The sexual connotations of this incident are clear, and, as with Aschenbach, the pomegranate suggests a sealed fate. Foscarina takes the fruit in her hand, staining her dress with its blood-red juice, and remembers 'la parole dell'animatore: "Questo è il mio corpo...Prendete e mangiate"'[146] (F 200). Christ's words add a religious overtone to the significance of the fruit, and transform Stelio into a kind of saviour, who will redeem tragedy, and art in general.

In such scenes Eros is ever-present. Stelio and Foscarina are drawn to each other by sexual desire and love, yet their union also involves collaborative artistic creation. But artistic success is also jeopardised by Eros, for periodically desire eclipses all else, and the artist feels himself gripped by a strangling desire.[147] This is 'la sola potenza verace e formidabile'[148] (F 411), 'il veleno che correva nel loro sangue umano'[149] (F 411), albeit unnamed as Eros. Foscarina's jealous desire to possess Stelio (even, sometimes, at the expense of art) expresses the will of Eros; her promises to do that which 'l'amore non puó'[150] (F 243) represent opposition to Eros, and the submission of self and Eros to art. In *Il fuoco* Otey finds illustration that 'D'Annunzio's formulation of tragedy, with Eros at its core [is] deeply invested in the

[145] The consequences of surrender to Eros, which include a loss of focus on art, loss of control and self-subjugation (as, too, in the case of Aschenbach), will be considered in more detail in the next chapter, 'Desire and Possession'.
[146] 'the words of the creator: "this is my body...take it and eat it"'; the word 'animatore' signifies one who entertains or 'animates' – in this context Stelio entertains his public with his speech, which results in the awakening or 'animation' of their spirits.
[147] We read that this is a desire which 'lo aveva preso alla gola con un impeto selvaggio' ('had taken him by the throat in a savage grip', F 155).
[148] 'the sole voracious and extraordinary power'.
[149] 'the poison which ran in their human blood'.
[150] 'love cannot'.

process of artistic creation'.[151] The creative process becomes the locus of modern tragedy through D'Annunzio's incorporation of the process into the novel, and becomes 'the site of [the audience's] salvation from the mediocrity of soul-deadening everyday life'.[152] In *Il fuoco* Eros is an impetus towards creation, and also a distraction from it. For Aschenbach Eros offers the same service and presents the same threat to creativity.

Foscarina's consciousness of the threat that she poses to Stelio's art leads her to melancholic contemplations, where she often concludes that death can release her (and Stelio), from such tribulations. Her character is shrouded in references to death, and after febrile episodes she often resembles a pale corpse. Stelio's name for her, 'Perdita' ('Lost'), is also suggestive of loss and death. In Stelio's Venice even the universal experience of death is mythicised, and where we find death we find Hades nearby. As Foscarina lies corpse-like in a gondola after her agitation in the maze, we encounter 'una landa stigia, come una visione dell'Ade [...]. E di qua, di là, per la scolorata riviera, come i Mani d'una gente scomparsa le statue passavano passavano'[153] (F 407). As Stelio feels the story of Persephone coming alive within him, a gondola journey becomes the passage of Persephone into the Underworld, and, as for Aschenbach, the boat becomes 'la barca di Caronte'[154] (F 30).

Considering the classical allusions employed by Mann and D'Annunzio, we find many important correspondences and affinities. Both Aschenbach and Stelio mythicise their surroundings and the characters with whom they interact (particularly those who provoke desire in them), and interpret their experiences in a classically

[151] Otey, p. 171.
[152] Ibid., p. 194.
[153] 'a Stygian land, like a vision of Hades [...]. And here, and there, along the discoloured shore, like the spirits of a vanished people, the statues passed by'; the word 'Mani' signifies deified souls to whom the ancient Romans made offerings of flowers, foods and ceremonies.
[154] 'the boat of Charon'.

inspired manner. In Aschenbach's case, however, Mann's narrator betrays a cynicism which hints at parody, whereas D'Annunzio seems to share Stelio's reverence for classicism and Attic tragedy. Both protagonists turn to classical models to provide hope for redemption. Aschenbach's 'classical rhetoric serves as a veil behind which to hide his lascivious desires'[155], and that of Stelio will deliver art and elevate his relationship with Foscarina beyond the level of 'piccoli amanti'[156] (F 415) and to the highest plane of artistic collaboration. The dangers of desire are exposed by recourse to classical figures such as Ganymede, Persephone and Cassandra, and Hades remains waiting in the wings, ready to claim our protagonists if they should stray his way.

[155] Chase, p. 93.
[156] 'petty lovers'.

Chapter Three: Desire and Possession

Eros, one of the classical presences whose function was briefly explored in the previous chapter, represents one of the key themes of both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco*. We observe him in the desire felt by Aschenbach for Tadzio, and between Foscarina and Stelio. In *Der Tod in Venedig* Eros is named, yet in *Il fuoco* he functions on a more symbolic level, hinted at as 'la sola potenza verace e formidabile'[1] (F 411). This chapter will explore how Eros and desire are represented in the two texts, and the impact of these impulses on the protagonists. The impact of Eros and desire specifically on the creative process will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

In both texts the protagonists engage with an object of desire, which acts as both an artistic muse and a distraction from creative production. The responses of the artist-protagonists oscillate between an impetus to create and the neglect of productivity and art. While Aschenbach writes some of his finest prose in Tadzio's presence, for example, he eventually abandons his work to pursue the boy around Venice. Similarly, Stelio is inspired by Foscarina, who collaborates creatively with him, but must also forsake his art when she becomes a distraction. The need to possess (and, at times, to be possessed) is bound up with these feelings of desire, and often occupies the protagonists to the point of obsession.

As we have seen, in *Il fuoco* Stelio and Foscarina are filled with desire for each other; they crave each other sexually, but also fear that consummation of their love will prove destructive. Foscarina, with her physical beauty and melancholy countenance, provides Stelio with artistic inspiration and allows him to 'see' the

[1] 'the sole voracious and formidable power'.

tragic figures of his forthcoming modern tragedy.[2] Stelio's first loyalty is to his art, and his desire for Foscarina is sparked not least by her artistic value (she also interprets his characters on stage). This, combined with Stelio's open admiration for the virginal singer Donatella Arvale, and Foscarina's awareness of her own ageing, leaves the latter insecure and jealous. At such times Stelio must abandon his work to reassure her. This creates a pattern throughout the novel, where Stelio devotes his whole being alternately to art and to Foscarina.

The climax of the erotic desire between Stelio and Foscarina is experienced during their violent embrace beneath the pomegranate tree after Stelio's speech. The ripe fruit that falls and bursts open hints at abundant fertility (contained, but now on the point of bursting forth), and a sexual tension which threatens to erupt violently. They have long resisted consummation, holding out for the perfect moment. In a clear indication of dominance, Foscarina yearns to be possessed and mastered,[3] and Stelio savagely desires her flesh.[4] Their whole bodies become possessed by desire and animal lust: 'Ella tremeva del tristo tremore carnale, preda della forza invincibile'[5] (F 201). This 'invincible force' seems a manifestation of Eros. Such is its power that at times the lovers seem mentally afflicted as their desire borders on madness: 'fissò su di lui uno sguardo acceso da un ardore quasi folle'[6] (F 47).

The effect of such desire is not limited to mental turbulence, it also manifests itself physically in the lovers. This is especially true of Foscarina, rendered susceptible by her melancholy and insecure nature; Stelio reminds her how 'I tuoi

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[2] Foscarina's metamorphosis into figures of Greek mythology and tragedy, and into the figures of D'Annunzio's own tragedy, have been explored in greater detail in the previous chapter.
[3] 'voleva esser presa e abbattuta all'improvviso da quella violenza maschia' ('she wanted to be taken and conquered suddenly by his masculine violence', F 187).
[4] 'Egli desiderò con un ardore selvaggio quella carne profonda' ('He desired her profound flesh with a savage ardour', F 188).
[5] ‚She trembled with a wretched, carnal shiver, taken by the invincible force'.
[6] 'she fixed him with an open look that was alight with an ardour bordering on insanity'.

denti battevano, prima che io ti toccassi...'[7] (F 234). The full effect that Eros has on Foscarina is demonstrated when she herself realises the magnitude of her desire. Fleeing Stelio and the basilica in feverish agitation she comes to a well in a deserted *piazza*.[8] Weakened by 'l'ebrezza del dolore'[9] (F 352) she leans against the well. This scene is paralleled in *Der Tod in Venedig*, where Aschenbach leans against a well in a deserted courtyard in a similar state of erotic delirium and exhaustion, considering his own desire (T 637). Indeed, Galvan finds this scene of *Il fuoco* to be one of 'drei topischen Situationen, die in genauer Entsprechung Stationen auf Aschenbachs Liebesweg markieren'.[10]

However, the relationship between Stelio and Foscarina does not consist solely of carnal desire. There is genuine affection and tenderness, too, as evidenced by Stelio's touching efforts to reassure Foscarina when she is ashamed of signs that she is ageing (F 226). Yet the most valuable aspect of their relationship, for Stelio at least, is its tendency to inspire creation. For Stelio, Foscarina holds 'una potenza risvegliatrice'[11] (F 256), and her very presence suffices to 'dare al mio spirito una fecondità incalcolabile'[12] (F 256). Just as Stelio perceives melodies on Venice's winds, so he hears them when he is with Foscarina (F 256). Only she can appear transfigured as the tragic heroine of Stelio's future work (F 478), and only she provides the crucial partner needed for creative collaboration. The ways in which Foscarina aids Stelio in the creative process with be examined more extensively in the

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[7] 'Your teeth chattered before I touched you'.
[8] 'Uno straordinario silenzio occupava il cortile deserto.' ('An extraordinary silence reigned over the deserted courtyard.' F 354).
[9] 'the intoxication of pain'.
[10] 'one of three topical situations, which, in exact correlation, mark stations along Aschenbach's path of love', Galvan, p. 265. The other two 'stations' are the labyrinth or maze (already mentioned) and the basilica of St Mark; Galvan likens the scene in which Aschenbach observes Tadzio during a mass in the Byzantine cathedral (T 617) to a similar episode in *Il fuoco*, where in agitation Foscarina flees Stelio and finds herself in the basilica (which D'Annunzio portrays with a similar atmosphere of Byzantine opulence as Mann) alongside a choir, and is disturbed by the figures in the mosaics (F 348).
[11] 'a power of revelation'.
[12] 'give my spirit an incalculable fertility'.

next chapter. In such episodes we observe Eros, represented by the sexual desire of the artist and the actress, stimulating the act of artistic production.

Yet this desire has another side, which has the opposite effect on the artist. Stelio, the 'Übermensch-Dichter'[13], would perhaps like to see his lover purely as a handmaiden to his artistic and sexual needs, and occasionally forgets that Foscarina is a human being, prone to human failings. She is especially susceptible to insecurities about her age[14] (mirrored by Aschenbach's embarrassed consciousness of his own age opposite Tadzio's youth), and jealousies regarding Donatella Arvale and Stelio's complete devotion to art (to the neglect of everything else). After the episode of artistic inspiration triggered by the Venetian winds, Stelio goes to Foscarina, who finds him altered, and wonders sadly, 'chi t'ha preso a me?'[15] (F 308) She perceives competition for her lover's attentions, and fluctuates between willing self-abnegation for Stelio's art[16] and selfish need for possession,[17] even biting him to leave her territorial mark (F235). In these insecurities she becomes burdensome to Stelio, who must often neglect his work to satiate her need for his devotion. In a particularly striking scene, Stelio calms Foscarina from a state of jealous agitation. As they embrace afterwards he finds himself suffocating beneath the weight of the woman, who pins him down involuntarily, with a corpse-like grip (F 237). Her embrace smothers him physically and mentally: 'Egli divenne inerte sotto la stretta'[18] (F 239),

[13] 'the Übermensch-poet', Klaus Heitmann, *Das italienische Deutschlandbild in seiner Geschichte: Das lange neunzehnte Jahrhundert (1800 – 1915)* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Press, 2008), p. 407.
[14] She is 'già sfiorata dall'ombra del decadimento fisicale' ('already touched by the shadow of physical decay'), Angela Felice, *Introduzione a D'Annunzio* (Bari: Editore Laterza, 1991), p. 96.
[15] 'Who has taken you from me?'
[16] She exclaims her desire to 'Servire, servire!' ('To serve, to serve!' F 186).
[17] See, for example, 'Ella voleva fermarlo, tenerlo, possederlo' ('She wanted to stop him, keep him, possess him', F 369).
[18] 'He became inert beneath her grip'.

and as a literal burden she weighs him down. He feels imprisoned[19] and suddenly becomes impatient and frustrated at not being free to create. A similar symbolic incident occurs in the maze at Strà, where Foscarina tries to detain Stelio from disappearing into the *labirinto* and leaving her alone; he protests, 'Lasciami andare!'[20] (F 402).

Stelio is thus periodically forced to subjugate his artistic impetus to Foscarina's anxieties, demonstrated by his gestures: 'Restò ai piedi di lei, nell'atto sommesso.'[21] (F 242) This is submission to the power of Eros, which eclipses art and creation. At such moments Stelio perceives a loss of artistic focus[22] because of the mastery of 'un'altra forza, più imperiosa e più torbida'[23] (F 411). Otey identifies this as a 'pattern of loss and recovery',[24] where the lovers' sexual union represents a loss of artistic focus, and their parting at the novel's resolution 'forms the complementary recovery'[25]. The pendulum which swings between devotion to art and submission to Eros is driven largely by the conflicting natures of the desires felt by Foscarina and Stelio.

Early on we observe a disparity of desire between Stelio and Foscarina. After Stelio's speech, Foscarina suddenly fears the moment of consummation, terrified that it will cause something to be lost, and weaken their love. She hesitates before Stelio's savage lust, which injures her,[26] but eventually his affectionate words, and his willingness to delay consummation, reassure her of his love.[27] Yet violent desire still

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[19] He is 'nella carcere del suo corpo, giacente sotto il peso della donna disperata' ('in the prison of his body, idle under the weight of the desperate woman', F 238).
[20] 'Let me go!'
[21] 'He remained at her feet, in a submissive act.'
[22] He senses that 'tra lui e l'attrice l'arte non aveva alcuna risonanza, alcun valore vivo' ('between him and the actress art had no resonance, no living value', F 411).
[23] 'another force, more masterful and more turbid'.
[24] Otey, p. 173.
[25] Ibid.
[26] She feels his desire 'come una ferita lacerante' ('like an excruciating wound', F 191).
[27] 'Ella aveva sentito l'amore nell'accento virile' ('She had heard love in the man's voice, F 194).

grips them both, and despite offering affection and patience Stelio persuades his lover that 'non potreste giungere all'alba senza di me, come io non potrei senza di voi!'[28] (F 196) The sexual union that follows represents surrender for Foscarina ('ella si donò',[29] F 196): she is willing to give herself to her lover, but not always to the artist, who demands unconditional service. Foscarina's fears are not allayed when she awakes the next morning to find Stelio already gone, 'come dal letto d'una cortigiana'[30] (F 203). Her insecurities intensify: 'Foscarina teme che la notte di passione abbia "devastato e perduto" il loro amore'.[31] Here we observe the destructive nature of their desire, a hint that it could prove harmful towards Stelio's artistic creation. Yet in this instance the clamorous events of the previous evening have given Stelio a fervent sense of 'novità'[32] (F 204), energy, and joy of creation, which Foscarina misinterprets as contemptuous impatience to escape her bed.

Foscarina wishes both for complete possession of her lover, an utter and mutual surrender to one another, but also desires to subjugate herself to his great artistic potential. She is a jealous and insecure lover, but she is also a servant of art, who wishes to aid Stelio in the conception of his tragedy. Yet her insecurities threaten Stelio's work: 'Ella si affrettava ora a trattenerlo, a farlo prigione'.[33] She knows that she both liberates him (creatively) and shackles him (emotionally), and at moments of reason and clarity understands that she must depart if his artistic project is to triumph. Death appeals to her melancholy nature, but eventually she resolves to leave Venice and go abroad. In this state of mind (which ultimately prevails) she pledges

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[28] 'you could not reach dawn without me, as I could not without you!'
[29] 'she gave herself'.
[30] 'as if from the bed of a courtesan'.
[31] 'Foscarina fears that the night of passion has "devastated and lost" their love', Prandolini, p. 381.
[32] 'newness'.
[33] 'She hurried now to hold him, to imprison him'. Her behaviour makes her appear as if she hopes to bewitch him, 'di poter trovare in quella notte un qualche filtro per legarlo a sè ultimamente' ('to find in that night some potion that would bind him to her definitively', F 45).

unconditional devotion. Announcing her decision to leave Venice, she tries to appear to Stelio as 'quel che sopra tutto ella doveva essere: un buono e fedele istrumento al servigio di una potenza geniale'[34] (F 549). Only Foscarina can inspire Stelio from afar as well as in his presence, and their parting represents mutual devotion to the artistic cause; in overcoming (but not stifling) their desire, they place Eros in the service of art.

With the nature of Foscarina's desire for Stelio established, we can examine the nature of the latter's sentiments towards his lover: a divergence emerges. Stelio is, first and foremost, an artist, an 'animatore'[35] (F 150), and his deepest loyalties are to art. While his love for Foscarina is partly tied to her artistic worth, there is also intense admiration for her beauty, and tender love.[36] Yet Stelio is no ordinary man, he is D'Annunzio's 'superuomo',[37] who strives to go beyond human limits. The price of this transcendence is that he cannot resemble those 'piccoli amanti'[38] (F 414), whose love is plagued by human failings. His lover, too, must meet these demands.[39] The artistic goal of Stelio and Foscarina elevates them above ordinary or mediocre love, and consequently they must be far more than ordinary lovers.

Stelio is stimulated creatively by Foscarina's love and her beauty,[40] but what he most desires in her is 'la creatura dionisiaca'[41] (F 189). For Stelio, Foscarina is 'la

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[34] 'that which above all she wished to be: a good and faithful instrument in service of the power of genius'.
[35] 'creator'.
[36] See, for example, 'ti amo, tu sola mi piaci; tutto mi piace in te' ('I love you, and only you; everything about you gives me pleasure', F 220).
[37] 'superman'; the term used to characterise Stelio by Romano Luperini, *La scrittura e l'interpretazione: storia e antologia della letteratura italiana nel quadro della civiltà europea* (Florence: Palumbo, 1998), p. 176.
[38] 'petty lovers'.
[39] Stelio reminds Foscarina: 'Bisogna sempre potere tutte le cose che può e tutte quelle che non può l'amore, per eguagliare la mia natura insaziabile' (You must always do everything you can and everything that love cannot, to match my insatiable nature', F 414).
[40] This happens especially when she appears 'bellissima' ('very beautiful', F 517).
[41] 'the Dionysian creature'.

potenza superstite del mito primitivo'[42] (F 155), which is 'accessible to the artist via sexual intercourse'.[43] Hence Stelio experiences an ardour that comes from '[la] primitiva bestialità delle mescolanze subitanee, dall'antico mistero delle libidini sacre'[44] (F 188). Foscarina is the 'nuovo simbolo [della] totalità della esperienza umana che gli antichi avevano figurato nel mito di Dioniso e delle divinità eleusinie',[45] and the act of possessing her becomes, for Stelio, a necessity, 'come atto conciliatore delle teorie estetiche altrui verso una personale risposta al problema che tanto lo travaglia'.[46] The sexual encounter can potentially reveal and reawaken those ancient and mysterious impulses which are fundamental to Stelio's artistic ambition, that of creating a modern tragedy. D'Annunzio's representation of artistic potential involves, as Otey observes, 'an external object that the artist must bring into his possession'[47] – namely, 'the female artist's body'.[48]

Stelio attempts to possess Foscarina sexually, and violent and forceful language portrays the artist as the dominant participant: 'io ti possederò come in un'orgia vasta; io ti scrollerò come un fascio di tirsi'[49] (F 154). The force of such language even links the process of creation with that of rape ('Egli desiderò [...], una violenza da compiere',[50] F 400) and insemination. Foscarina becomes the receptacle of his artistic talent, and at his word her spirit becomes 'concavo come un calice per

[42] 'the surviving power of primitive myth'.
[43] Otey, p. 174.
[44] 'the primitive bestiality of sudden couplings, from the ancient mystery of sacred lust'.
[45] 'new symbol of the totality of the human experience that the ancients had portrayed in the myth of Dionysus and the Eleusinian divinities', Moevs, p.289.
[46] 'like an act of conciliation of the aesthetic theories of others towards a personal response to the problem which afflicts him', Ibid.
[47] Otey, p. 174.
[48] Ibid. Moevs notes that 'Il senso di possesso fisico della cosa bella, [...] è [...] necessità profonda e costante di tutta l'estetica dannunziana.' ('The sense of physical possession of a thing of beauty, [...] is [...] a deep and constant necessity of D'Annunzio's aesthetic.') Moevs, p. 55.
[49] 'I will possess you as in a vast orgy; I will wield you as a bundle of Bacchic wands'.
[50] 'He desired [...], a rape to accomplish'.

ricevere quell'onda'[51] (F 27). Stelio's regret at not having possessed the actress directly after a performance, still warm with the audience's breath and panting with intoxication (F189), indicates how tightly bound sexual and artistic excitement are for him.

The importance of sensuality to D'Annunzio is clear. Moevs notes the impact of the famous German art historian and archaeologist Winckelmann (1717–1768) on D'Annunzio's aesthetic values, reproducing a passage from Pater's *The Renaissance, Studies in Art and Poetry*, highlighted by D'Annunzio. The passage describes how Winckelmann 'apprehended the subtlest principles of the Hellenic manner, not through the understanding, but by the instinct or touch'.[52] Moevs finds this reflected in D'Annunzio's poetics, and it certainly seems relevant to *Il fuoco*. Foscarina is often likened to a statue, and appropriates the poses of statues when practising her art; Fleischer points out that sculptors create art 'through direct physical contact with their material'.[53] The sensual experience of sexual intercourse seems necessary for Stelio to fully profit from Foscarina's qualities of inspiration, and we see that 'it is not, then, beauty which captivates us, but sensuality'.[54] The same is true for Aschenbach, who lets sensuality, not beauty, be his guide, even if does not recognise this.

While creation is linked positively to sexual intercourse, Stelio realises that he must transcend this, and tame his erotic desires for Foscarina. He is plagued by 'sentimenti contradditori'[55] (love for Foscarina and faithfulness to art), and must ensure that their relationship remains 'un accordo libero e non un vincolo gravoso'[56]

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[51] 'concave like a chalice, to receive that wave'.
[52] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 154.
[53] Fleischer, p. 27.
[54] Johann Winckelmann, cited in Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 120
[55] Prandolini, p. 381.
[56] 'a free accord, and not a burdensome commitment'.

(F 410). When their love becomes burdensome, he feels himself 'soffocare e impallidire'[57] (F 155).[58] He cannot promise Foscarina exclusivity, nor renounce any desire which could benefit his art; hence his inclusion of Donatella in the (Nietzschean) 'Trinità dionisiaca'[59] (F 204). For, as already established, his fidelity is to his artistic project, symbolically illustrated when he periodically sees his lover transfigured into his artistic medium.[60] Foscarina senses this, apprehending moments where Stelio loves neither her nor Donatella, but views them only as instruments of his art.[61] Returning to *Der Tod in Venedig*, this seems something Aschenbach cannot do: once his desire for Tadzio has become overwhelmingly sensual and erotic, he can no longer view the boy as an artistic 'tool', and the muse becomes the master.

The differences in the desire which Stelio and Foscarina feel is illustrated during a visit to Murano: 'La volontà dell'una diceva: "Io ti amo e ti voglio tutto per me sola, anima e corpo". La volontà dell'altro diceva: "Io voglio che tu mi ami e mi serva".'[62] (F 412) The cycle of devotion to art and to Eros (often caused by Foscarina's alternating desires to possess Stelio and to serve him artistically) ends with Foscarina's departure. Otey finds that this resolution is only possible '*after* the overwhelming potential of Eros has been experienced',[63] that the threat posed to creation by desire (i.e. by Eros) is actually necessary, and must be incorporated into the process of creation. Foscarina's departure does not end their relationship and

[57] 'suffocate and lose his colour'.
[58] Colour is of paramount importance to D'Annunzio, as evidenced by the rich and varied colours of *Il fuoco*, and a loss of colour could imply a loss of vitality and creativity.
[59] 'Dionysian Trinity'.
[60] See, for example: 'Egli non vedeva più in lei l'amante di una notte, [...]; ma vedeva lo strumento mirabile dell'arte novella' ('He no longer saw in her the lover of a night, [..] but he saw the miraculous instrument of new art', F 95).
[61] Foscarina perceives that 'in quell'ora egli non amava nessuno: non lei, non Donatella' ('in that hour he loved nobody, neither her nor Donatella', F 491) and sees only 'forze da adoprare' ('forces to make use of', F 491).
[62] 'The will of the woman said: "I love you and I want you all to myself, soul and body". The will of the man said: "I want you to love and serve me".'
[63] Otey, p. 172.

collaboration; rather, it tames Eros' power, which is channelled into the service of artistic creation. Hence the lovers part with the promise of future artistic collaboration.

As Foscarina departs, the imminence of Stelio's creative labours is hinted at by the copy of Dürer's *Melenconia* (F 551) lying amongst Foscarina's luggage: 'D'Annunzio's long ekphrasis of the image interprets the Angel as an artist on the verge of creative labour'[64], just as Stelio is soon to gain renown for his coming work.[65]

Mann's Aschenbach has already won literary recognition; his works feature on the school curriculum and he has been ennobled. Yet when we first encounter him in Munich he is suffering from writer's block. He lacks that '*motus animi continuus*' (T 559) that drives his creativity. He hopes a walk will regenerate him, and during it he is struck by that sudden urge to travel – Mann's deliberately ambiguous and ominous term is 'Reiselust'[66] (T 562) – which eventually leads him to Venice.

Like Stelio, Aschenbach encounters a character in Venice who arouses his desire, and inspires him to, admittedly short-lived, creative productivity. The gradual intensification of Aschenbach's desire for the character he encounters (Tadzio) also distracts him from his creative work, just as it does Stelio. But in Aschenbach's case, there is no recovery once creative focus has been lost, and no return to artistic devotion: instead the writer eventually becomes Eros' slave and surrenders his creative powers.

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[64] Otey, p. 173.
[65] This painting appears, too, in Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (Doctor Faustus, 1947), in the bedroom of the young musical genius Adrian Leverkühn: 'for in the Renaissance – Dürer's time – it was thought that artistic genius was a refined and intensified form of melancholy', Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 214.
[66] 'desire to travel'.

Aschenbach's initial response to Tadzio is 'Erstaunen'[67] (T 585), for he seems 'vollkommen schön'[68] (T 585). Aschenbach's first aesthetic analysis of the boy (T 585) describes his appearance in great detail, and likens him to the 'Dornauszieher' (or the 'Spinario', T 585), the Hellenistic sculpture of a boy pulling a thorn from his foot. This first response to Tadzio 'results in a classical aesthetic characterisation',[69] in which Aschenbach turns to a familiar model to interpret this striking new figure. Johnson points out that in this passage of Mann's text, 'Aschenbach' is replaced by pronouns,[70] creating 'a buffer of aesthetic differentiation' and a 'Kantian disinterestedness'.[71] Yet even in this controlled, distanced appreciation, there is a warning: when dinner is announced, the Polish family remains seated, and 'Aschenbach [...] wartete mit ihnen'[72] (T 586). As he will come to do ever more frequently, he allows Tadzio to dictate his movements – he follows his lead. Mann's narrator also hints that Aschenbach's initial cool interest will become more ardent, exposing the habits of artists whose apparently disinterested approval disguises 'ihr Entzücken, ihre Hingerissenheit'[73] (T 589).

Aschenbach's fascination with Tadzio grows, and he (consciously) spends ever more time in his presence. Nourishment and rest that would once have promoted productivity are now allowed to dissipate, wasted in idle, but blissful, hours watching Tadzio[74]. Aschenbach's world begins to revolve around the boy. As Tadzio becomes the sun around which Aschenbach orbits, we read that he goes to bed early, 'denn um

[67] 'astonishment'.
[68] 'perfectly beautiful'.
[69] Gary Chase Johnson, 'Death in Venice and the Aesthetic Correlative', *The Journal of Modern Literature*, 27 (2004), 83-96, (p. 87).
[70] For example, 'der Betrachtenden' ('the onlooker', T 585).
[71] Johnson, p. 87.
[72] 'waited with them'.
[73] 'their delight, their rapture'.
[74] 'Zwar liebt Eros [...] den Müßiggang' ('Eros loves [...] idleness', T 608).

neun Uhr, wenn Tadzio vom Schauplatz verschwunden war, schien der Tag ihm beendet'[75] (T 610).

The 'Schauplatz'[76] of the beach enables Aschenbach to watch Tadzio and observe his form closely. Aschenbach's initial 'Kantian disinterestedness'[77] begins to give way to a more sensual response, and the meaning of Aschenbach's delight moves, as Reed describes, 'towards the one Nietzsche borrowed from Stendhal, that "beauty is a promise of happiness".'[78] Aesthetic appreciation shifts towards sensual excitement and desire. Just as Stelio hungers for the sensual stimulation that his muse provides, so Aschenbach departs from disinterested aesthetic appreciation. Eros has taken up residence in Aschenbach's psyche, and will create havoc for the writer.

Aschenbach's conscience, however, does not remain silent (at least, initially) on the matter of his forbidden desire. He imagines his ancestors' disapproval, for example, and even after he lingers at Tadzio's doorway, at risk of being caught, 'fehlte es nicht an Augenblicken des Innehaltens und der halben Bestimmung.'[79] (T 619) These moments of hesitation before Eros are comparable to Stelio's periodic attempts to overcome Eros' hold over him. Aschenbach wonders at the road he has found himself on; but seems unable to turn off this path. Once his self-reproach has faded (it is non-existent after his Dionysian dream), it is only the narrator's voice which criticises Aschenbach's behaviour. Sarcasm betrays disapproval as Aschenbach collapses in feverish distraction after a fruitless pursuit of the Polish family: 'Er saß dort, der Meister, der würdig gewordene Künstler, [...] der in so vorbildlich reiner

[75] 'for at nine o'clock, if Tadzio had disappeared from the stage, the day seemed to him already over'.
[76] The usage of this word demonstrates one of the occasions where Aschenbach interprets Tadzio's surroundings as complimenting the boy; Tadzio's background is not incidental, but shaped and determined by his presence.
[77] Johnson, p. 87. By 'disinterest' we understand a cool appreciation that is objective and neutral, a purely sensory experience that bears no connection with desire in the individual.
[78] Reed, 1994, p. 52; see also Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* III, § 6.
[79] 'there were still moments of hesitation and half contemplation'.

Form dem Zigeunertum und der trüben Tiefe abgesagt [...] hatte'[80] (T 637). As Mundt argues, however, this disapproval may not condemn Aschenbach's desire, but rather the behaviour to which it has led him.[81] For Aschenbach's 'Ich liebe dich!'[82] (T 614) is 'heilig doch'[83] (T 614).

Attempting to dignify his desire, Aschenbach turns to the dialogues of Plato and Plutarch. As seen in the previous chapter, by casting himself as Socrates, the tutor and companion of Phaedrus (Tadzio) in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Aschenbach attempts to present his reaction to Tadzio as honourable and innocent. Tadzio is both male and adolescent, and Aschenbach must look to antiquity to find a comparable experience with the noble exterior he wishes to assume; for 'what is anathema to Munich was Sparta's joy'.[84] The texts on which he draws are discussions on the theme of love, and specifically on Eros. In turning to these texts Aschenbach shows an awareness of the nature of his desire for Tadzio, but claims that the service Eros performs renders his impulses noble and artistically valuable: Eros often avails himself of youthful boys[85] to grant the beholder a glimpse of 'the eternal Forms that our souls once saw in heaven'.[86] Thus Eros is said to convey his initiates to a realm of understanding and philosophy.

Aschenbach hopes that Tadzio will reignite his creative flame and that Eros will act according to Plato's doctrine. Watching Tadzio on the beach, and taking 'den

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[80] 'There he sat, the master, the worthy artist, [...] who had, in such a commendable way, spoken against wandering and murky depths'.
[81] Mundt, p. 92.
[82] 'I love you!'
[83] 'sacred nevertheless'.
[84] Heilbut, p. 256.
[85] 'der Gestalt und Farbe menschlicher Jugend' ('the form and colours of human youth', T 606).
[86] Shookman, 2004, p. 79. In Plato's *Symposium* Socrates speaks of ascension towards the highest contemplation: 'a person properly initiated into the mystery of love rises on a ladder or a stairway [...]' and is eventually granted a sight of Beauty in its 'original', Platonic Form. 'The love of beauty can thus lead to a love of wisdom and truth – in other words, to philosophy' (ibid.).

Wuchs des Knaben zum Muster'[87] (T 608), Aschenbach is overcome with a creative impulse and writes his most sublime prose (T 608), which will be greatly admired afterwards. But the productivity is short-lived: he writes only one and a half pages, and then nothing more. After this brief spurt of creativity Aschenbach descends into slavish, obsessive voyeurism. He is reduced to stalking Tadzio through the alleys and canals of Venice.

For this reason, Aschenbach's Platonism can only be an illusion (or delusion); his feelings for Tadzio do not convey Aschenbach to a state of enlightenment, but instead to delirium, confusion and abandon. The chaotic, orgiastic scenes of his Dionysian dream illustrate the mental state at which Aschenbach has arrived; there is little resembling wisdom or contemplation here. His actions become those of one afflicted by 'erotic madness',[88] as described in Plutarch's *Erotikos*: here 'there is no reading of literature [...] that restores him to calm. He loves when present and longs when absent'.[89] Hence we find Aschenbach fretting over Tadzio's absence when the family dines in Venice (T 613), following the boy through the city (T 617), and shamelessly leaning his head against Tadzio's door at night – 'ohne Scheu und Erröten durchgehen zu lassen'[90] (T 619).

Aschenbach's dream, signalling surrender to Dionysus, reveals another potential link to Freud. Freud's *Über den Traum*[91] (1901) considers the importance of dreaming as a process which 'transforms latent, or hidden, thoughts into the manifest, or palpable, content of dreams'.[92] The content of 'every dream derives from a recent

[87] 'the measure of the lad as a template'.
[88] Barberà, p. 18.
[89] Ibid.
[90] 'without allowing for timidity and blushes'.
[91] 'On Dreams'.
[92] Shookman, 2004, p. 100.

event or impression'.[93] This seems applicable to Aschenbach: his hallucination of the tropical swamp-land (T 562) comes with his 'Reiselust'[94] (T 562), and reveals his longing for new landscapes and remote places. His Dionysian dream features the 'u-Laut' (T 632) of Tadzio's name,[95] heard on the beach a few days previously (T 592), recalling a recent event that has become connected to a repressed desire. Further possible affinities with Freud's theory emerge when we examine Mann's language. Describing Aschenbach's fatigue at the beginning of the novella, he uses words such as 'Hemmung'[96] (T 563) and 'Unlust'[97] (T 564), terms employed by Freud in his *Über den Traum*.

The intensification of Aschenbach's desire affects his psychological state, then; but we also observe physical effects, just as in *Il fuoco*. After his abortive attempt to leave Venice, Aschenbach realises that he had been reluctant to depart because of Tadzio. He lacks the strength to do what Foscarina finally manages – to depart from the beloved. Realising this he experiences 'die Begeisterung seines Blutes, die Freude, den Schmerz seiner Seele'[98] (T 601). Later on he will find himself speeding up to approach Tadzio, his heart thudding (T 609), and after a climactic pursuit of the Polish family around the city he swoons against a well in a deserted *piazza*: 'Sein Kopf brannte, sein Körper war mit klebrigem Schweiß bedeckt, sein Genick zitterte'[99] (T 636).

Such behaviour puzzles the reader, and we wonder at Aschenbach's transformation. His once controlled and Apollinian nature becomes consumed by

[93] Ibid.
[94] 'desire to travel'.
[95] 'u-sound'. Aschenbach hears the name pronounced as 'Tadzi*u*' by his Polish relatives, where the '*u*'-sound is emphasised.
[96] 'repression'.
[97] 'disinclination'.
[98] 'a excitement of his blood, the joy, the pain of his soul'.
[99] 'His head burned, his body was covered with sticky sweat, his neck trembled'. As mentioned earlier, both Aschenbach's febrile state, and the location in which he finds himself, bear a striking resemblance to the well-scene of *Il fuoco*.

obsessive desire and loss of control, apparently triggered by his encounter with an attractive youth. Johnson highlights this 'aporia between emotion and expression'[100] as a key feature of the novella; Aschenbach's response to Tadzio does *not* seem reasonable, and we must search to find an 'aesthetic correlative'[101] to his desire. This could lie in Mann's use of allegory: Aschenbach interprets his experiences allegorically in order to rationalise them and to reassure himself, as demonstrated by his insertion of himself and Tadzio into various classical dialogues. Thus Tadzio becomes 'göttlich'[102] (T 608) and Aschenbach's response seems more appropriate; 'idol-worship'[103] seems excessive in the case of a mere boy, but if he believes he is in the presence of a deity we can perhaps comprehend his actions.

Aschenbach's interpretation of Tadzio as a statue chimes with this, elevating Tadzio from an ordinary (albeit attractive) boy to an allegorical level. Similarly Foscarina becomes a marble figure for Stelio in *Il fuoco*. As in D'Annunzio's text, Winckelmannian ideas become relevant. When likening Tadzio to the head of Eros, Aschenbach describes the 'gelblichen Schmelze *parischen* [*sic*] Marmors'[104] (emphasis mine) (T 589). He notably sees a later reproduction of the deity, rather than an authentic classical sculpture, perhaps looking to eighteenth century critics (such as Winckelmann) and their interpretations of classical art. For Winckelmann, aesthetic beauty promises a noble morality, which the artist must mirror: the artist 'must participate in the beauty and the nobility of his subject'. [105] Yet as Winckelmann also observes: 'alsdann ist es nicht die Schönheit, die uns einnimmt, sondern die

[100] Johnson, p. 86.
[101] Ibid.
[102] 'divine'.
[103] Johnson, p. 89.
[104] 'yellowish hue of Parisian marble'.
[105] Johnson, p. 91.

Wollust'.[106] If this theory is present in Aschenbach's mind, then, he may feel justified in his shift from mild admiration of Tadzio's statuesque physique to a more sensual response.

Considering the sensual aspect of Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio, we must examine the act of writing to which the former is inspired. The composition takes its 'template' directly from Tadzio's body, and the writer strives to allow 'seinen Stil den Linien dieses Körpers folgen zu lassen'[107] (T 608). Thus he hopes to raise Tadzio's beauty up to lofty heights, just as Zeus lifted Ganymede's beautiful body to the heavens. Yet Ganymede was abducted to satisfy Zeus's erotic needs, and we begin to suspect that Aschenbach's creative act has a sensual and erotic core. The act is described as 'Verkehr des Geistes mit einem Körper'[108] (T 608), which leaves the writer feeling 'als ob sein Gewissen wie nach einer Ausschweifung Klage führe'[109] (T 609). This statement is laden with significance: the mention of Aschenbach's conscience suggests an awareness of, and unease with, the impulses that have driven him to write; an 'excess' signals a departure from the (Apollinian) principle of 'nicht zu viel!'[110], and carries connotations of sexual excess, or even orgies (hinting at the Dionysian worship in which Aschenbach will 'participate' his dream later on). After writing his vignette Aschenbach's condition is telling; he is 'zerrüttet'[111] (T 609), which suggests the psychological disintegration that this act of writing marks. The creative process (which will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter) here seems potentially dangerous and destructive, leaving Aschenbach exhausted and spent, even broken.

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[106] 'It is not beauty, then, which fascinates us, but sensuality', Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums, Vol. 1* (Vienna: Akademischer Verlag, 1776), p. 250.
[107] 'his style to follow the lines of this body'.
[108] 'intercourse of the soul with a body'.
[109] 'as if his conscience reproached him after an excess'.
[110] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 4.
[111] 'shattered'.

Aschenbach already knows these dangers, via Xenophon's recollections of Socrates' teachings. Eros' presence may prove harmful not only to art (distracting from creative production), but also to Aschenbach, as is the case for Stelio. Witnessing Jaschiu kissing Tadzio, Aschenbach recalls Socrates' warning to Critobulus in a similar situation: 'Dir aber rat ich Kritobulos [....] geh ein Jahr auf Reisen! Denn soviel brauchst du mindestens Zeit zur Genesung'[112] (T 593). Tadzio's beauty renders him lethal, and Aschenbach remembers Socrates' warning of the dangers of the truly beautiful. But Aschenbach will ignore this warning, and embrace his desires regardless of their perils. The threat of cholera compounds these dangers, and his prolonged stay in Venice results in his death.

As explained in Chapter One, Aschenbach's death is often identified as a *Liebestod*. In this term we find love and death linked; Eros' proximity to death throughout *Der Tod in Venedig* is tangible, and is consolidated in Aschenbach's final moments, watching Tadzio at the shore. Here, the boy (previously likened to Eros, T 589) is identified with Hermes,[113] who guides souls to the Underworld, intensifying the link between Eros and death. Aschenbach's object of desire, whom he has slavishly followed, now 'leads' him to his death.

In both *Il fuoco* and *Der Tod in Venedig*, we see Eros (represented by the impulses of desire felt between the protagonists) promoting creative impulses. Foscarina possesses a unique ability to stimulate Stelio's creativity, and offers the prospect of collaborative creation; and, for Aschenbach, Tadzio triggers a sudden urge to write. But Stelio and Aschenbach neglect their work as desire overwhelms them. Eros also triggers a loss of control, and impairs creativity: Aschenbach becomes 'der

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[112] 'I advise you Critobulus [...], travel for a year! For you will need at least this much time to recover'.

[113] He appears as 'der bleiche und liebliche Psychagog' ('the pale and sweet psychagogue', T 641).

Verwirrte'[114] (T 619) and Stelio experiences a desire that becomes 'insano e smisurato'[115] (F 189).

A major difference between Aschenbach's and Stelio's experiences of desire is that only in the latter case is desire reciprocated. Stelio and Foscarina create together, and share an 'erotic' experience, whereas Mann's artist is decidedly 'der Einsame'[116] (T 621). He exchanges only glances with his 'muse' (who is nevertheless aware of the gaze of the older man), and the height of their contact is Tadzio's fateful smile ('das Lächeln der Narziß',[117] T 614). Yet this does not diminish the strength of Aschenbach's enthralment to Tadzio; indeed, Heilbut notes that 'the relationship between people who know each other only by sight is the most provocative of all'.[118]

The resolutions of *Il fuoco* and *Der Tod in Venedig* reveal their major divergence. D'Annunzio, optimistic for artistic regeneration, allows space for Stelio's creativity to flourish with Foscarina's departure. Art does not triumph *over* Eros, but *with* Eros. Desire is not denied or negated, but neither is it allowed mastery over all else. The destructive potential of the lovers' desire is extinguished by the physical distance between them, allowing space for art and creation. Mann's protagonist, on the other hand, cannot escape, once his desire for Tadzio has overpowered him and Eros has become his master; henceforth his every impulse must serve Eros, including, crucially, the impulse to create. Artistic creativity, then, is inextricably bound to the erotic experiences (or imaginings) of Stelio and Aschenbach; the creative act is both stimulated and hindered by the presence of the object of desire. The creative act, and its relationship with the impulses of desire and possession which have been explored in this chapter, will now be considered in greater detail.

[114] 'the bewildered one'.
[115] 'insane and disproportionate'.
[116] 'the lonely one'.
[117] 'the smile of Narcissus'.
[118] Heilbut, p. 256.

Chapter Four: The Creative Process

For both Mann's Aschenbach and D'Annunzio's Stelio Effrena, Venice provides a setting for engagement with an object of desire that is bound to artistic creation. Whilst Tadzio and Foscarina stimulate creative productivity in Aschenbach and Stelio respectively as 'muses', they also distract and divert, *endangering* this process of artistic creation. The artist becomes a battleground, where creative and sensual impulses compete for mastery. As long as the artist can control and harness this desire, creativity is possible, indeed, fuelled; but when Eros overpowers his initiate, the will to create is surrendered.

Mann's artist is 'der geduldige Künstler'[1] (T 565), whose distinguished writing is characterised by restraint, 'ordnende Kraft und antithetische Beredsamkeit'[2] (T 565), inviting comparison with Schiller (according to the narrator). He is said to have 'achieved in earnest the classical style befitting a conqueror of the abyss – the very style which Mann parodies in telling the [...] story of Aschenbach's disillusion and downfall'.[3] Aschenbach was born of the marriage of 'dienstlich nüchterner Gewissenhaftigkeit mit dunkleren, feurigeren Impulsen'[4] (T 565), accounting for his creative yet self-possessed character. Literary fame came early, and Aschenbach's childhood was characterised by a rigid ethic of achievement; one of his maxims is 'Durchhalten'[5] (T 566). This 'Leistungsethik'[6] was shared by Mann himself; in fact, both Aschenbach's literary legacy and family history resemble that of his creator. Aschenbach's literature and character are marked by control, self-discipline and a

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[1] 'the patient artist'.
[2] 'organised power and antithetical eloquence'.
[3] Heller, E., p. 99.
[4] 'business-like, austere diligence with darker, more fiery impulses'.
[5] 'Hold steady'.
[6] 'ethics of achievement', T. J. Reed, *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 93.

monastic routine. As we have seen, to borrow Nietzsche's terminology of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, it is to the (excessively) Apollinian that Aschenbach initially belongs.[7]

However, the reader first encounters Aschenbach at a time of artistic difficulty. He is troubled by what he interprets as writer's block, and is exhausted from his morning's work.[8] It is during his sojourn in Venice, prompted by the 'Reiselust'[9] (T 562) that accompanies this creative block, that he will succeed in writing once again; moreover, the literature that he will produce there will be amongst his best, a treatise whose 'Lauterkeit, Adel und schwingende Gefühlsspannung binnen kurzem die Bewunderung vieler erregen sollte'[10] (T 608).

As already established, Achenbach's first encounter with Tadzio puts him in mind of the noblest age of Greek statuary,[11] as he is struck by the boy's perfect beauty. Another glimpse the next morning brings Homer to mind, and Aschenbach quotes from the classical epics to himself (T 588). Aschenbach's observations of Tadzio leave the mind of the older man artistically fertile, prompting him to think in terms of aesthetic perfection and artistic nobility.

As seen in the previous chapter, however, Aschenbach's initial 'Kantian disinterestedness'[12] gradually intensifies into a more sensual and ardent fascination, and eventually obsession. Once he is even tempted to catch up with the boy walking

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[7] The fact that Aschenbach casts himself as Socrates in his imagined dialogues with Tadzio may be related to this; Nietzsche characterises Socrates as excessively Apollinian, and posited the Socratic as the new antagonist of the Dionysian. The Socratic and the Dionysian make up 'der neue Gegensatz', 'the new dichotomy' (Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik),* § 12). This may have influenced Mann's decision to identify his protagonist with him.

[8] We are told that Aschenbach 'hatte [...] dem Fortschwingen des produzierenden Triebwerks in seinem Innern, [...] nicht Einhalt zu tun vermocht' ('the writer had been unable [...] to halt the continuous revolution of the productive drive within himself', T 559).

[9] 'desire to travel'.

[10] 'purity, nobility, and depth of emotion would, within a short space of time, arouse the admiration of many'.

[11] Specifically, as already mentioned, he is reminded of the 'Dornauszieher' ('Spinario', T 585).

[12] Johnson, p. 87.

ahead, and contemplates touching him (T 609). Yet as one who thinks better of reaching out to touch a museum piece, he resists, for still there are moments of 'Innehaltens und der halben Besinnung'[13] (T 619). But this more sensual edge to Aschenbach's fascination with Tadzio becomes stronger, and we realise that his classicism has been an attempt to cloak the elements of desire that seem (morally) unpalatable: 'the aestheticisation of sensual desires provides a screen; it allows Aschenbach, in the beginning at least, to protect himself from having to recognize the truth'.[14] He has employed this strategy since the beginning of the novella, reassuring himself – almost too eagerly, as if defending himself against as yet unlevelled accusations, perhaps from his own subconscious – that his creative difficulties and unsettled mental state merely indicate a need for a change of scenery: 'Es war Reiselust, nichts weiter'[15] (T 562), he claims.[16] Seeking to dignify his interest in Tadzio, he now casts himself as Socrates and Tadzio as his pupil, Phaedrus. But, as demonstrated, classical allusions (for example, to the Trojan shepherd Ganymede, T 609) hint at the dangerous aspects of Aschenbach's desires, and we begin to suspect that there is more to the artist-muse relationship he has constructed. This self-delusion will continue until he is confronted with the extent of his feverish obsession as he swoons at the well, recognising that, actually, 'Form und Unbefangenheit [...] führen zum Rausch und zum Begierde, führen den Edlen vielleicht zu grauenhaftem Gefühlsfrevel, [...] führen zum Abgrund'[17] (T 638).

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[13] 'pause and half-consciousness'.
[14] Victor Brombert, 'Aschenbach and the Lure of the Abyss' in *The Yale Review,* 95 (2007), 1-14 (p. 6).
[15] 'It was a desire to travel, nothing more'.
[16] Lubich notes that Aschenbach attempts to convince himself 'als gälte es den Verdacht, den der "Unanständige Psychologismus" gegen die wahre Motivation der Reiselust erheben könnte' ('as if there were a suspicion that the 'indecent psychologising' could cast upon the true motives of his desire to travel'), Frederick Alfred Lubich, *Die Dialektik von Logos und Eros im Werk von Thomas Mann* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter University Press, 1986), p. 27.
[17] 'form and objectivity [...] lead the noble one to intoxication and desire, lead the noble one perhaps to atrocious emotion transgressions, [...] lead to the abyss'.

Tadzio is indeed a muse of sorts, as we see when Aschenbach is struck by a sudden inspiration to write on the beach. The desire to write comes 'plötzlich'[18] (T 608), and he feels compelled to write expressly 'in Tadzios Gegenwart'[19] (T 608), watching him against the sea.[20] The urge is 'unwiderstehlich'[21] (T 608), and the artist's words are directly inspired by the anatomy of the perfectly beautiful youth before him. He endeavours 'beim Schreiben den Wuchs des Knaben zum Muster zu nehmen, seinen Stil den Linien dieses Körpers folgen zu lassen'[22] (T 608). The creative process demands this interaction (of a kind) between the body of the boy and the artist.

Aschenbach has already noted that Tadzio seems sickly and will probably die young (T 595), an observation which brought Aschenbach a perverse sense of pleasure.[23] An early death for Tadzio would ensure that Aschenbach had no rivals[24] and would preserve Tadzio's youth and beauty from the decay of age.[25] Tadzio will retain his aesthetically pleasing appearance – just like a statue. Indeed, Aschenbach's appreciations of the boy often liken him to marble statuary ('das Haupt des Eros, vom gelblichen Schmelze parischen Marmors',[26] T 589), and when he writes he uses Tadzio's body as a template – as would a sculptor. Aschenbach wishes 'to render and

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[18] 'suddenly'.
[19] 'in Tadzio's presence'.
[20] The sea here acts as a 'screen for projections of word and image' (Robertson, p. 68).
[21] 'irresistible'.
[22] 'to let his writing take the proportions of the youth as a template, to let his style follow the lines of the body'.
[23] Although Aschenbach declines to account for this sensation, perhaps subconsciously aware that it will cast a sinister light upon his fascination with the boy.
[24] Heilbut, p. 254.
[25] By contrast, Aschenbach becomes acutely aware of his own age when confronted with Tadzio's youth, and even allows the hotel barber to dye his hair and apply make-up in an attempt to appear more youthful (T 635).
[26] 'the head of Eros, with the yellow hue of Parisian marble'.

isolate a beautiful figure in such a way that it transcends both time and the physical world'[27]; he wants 'Tadzio to stand as [...] a monument.'[28]

The fruit of Aschenbach's sudden labour is the treatise that will win acclaim and is amongst the writer's best work; but it is a mere one and a half pages long, and the last spurt of creative productivity that we witness. The text's genesis remains an uncomfortable issue, and Mann's narrator comments that it is perhaps best that Aschenbach's audience will never know the conditions under which it was written[29] (T 608). For this prose is ultimately the fruit of 'zeugender Verkehr des Geistes mit einem Körper'[30] (T 608); and, moreover, 'Verkehr'[31] (laden with connotations of sexual intercourse) with a young boy.

It is not just Mann's narrator who notes the troubling nature of the text's origin; these 'gefährlich köstlichen Stunden'[32] (T 608) are likened to an excess ('eine Ausschweifung',[33] T 609), and Aschenbach is pricked with unease about what drove him to write. Apollinian restraint has been abandoned for excess, laden with connotations of sexual excess, or even the Dionysian orgies, of which Aschenbach will feel a part in his dream later on.

The sexual overtones of Aschenbach's act of writing have led critics to debate whether the creative process here represents a type of gratification, or even consummation. Heilbut suggests that this is how 'a Mannian voyeur seeks consummation',[34] and Aschenbach's sensation that 'Eros im Worte sei'[35] (T 608)

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[27] Johnson, p. 94.
[28] Ibid.
[29] 'Es ist sicher gut, daß die Welt nur das schöne Werk, nicht auch seine Ursprünge, nicht seine Entstehungsbedingungen kennt.' ('It is certainly a good thing that the world should know only this beautiful work, and not its origin, nor the conditions under which it came into being.' T 608).
[30] 'generative intercourse of the mind with a body'.
[31] 'intercourse'.
[32] 'dangerously delightful hours'.
[33] 'an excess'.
[34] Heilbut, p. 255.
[35] 'Eros is in the word'.

lends weight to this. If the artist perceives Eros in the word, then the process of writing becomes an act rife with erotic overtones and fuelled by desire; this is a far cry from the Platonic ideal of intellectual illumination through transcendence of physical yearning. Tadzio has stimulated more than just artistic creativity. While Aschenbach never touches Tadzio, the act of writing undoubtedly involves an intimate, if still abstract form of interaction with the boy's body. Others take Aschenbach's acknowledgement of desire as a more reliable indicator of his surrender than any supposed act of 'consummation' on his part.[36] Yet despite his illicit desires, Aschenbach exchanges only a smile with Tadzio. Whatever gratification is afforded Aschenbach from his writing on the beach, it remains a creative act, not a physical one. Nevertheless, this act carries unwholesome suggestions, and we must consider Aschenbach's state afterwards: he is 'zerrüttet'[37] (T 609), exhausted as if after an erotic encounter.

Aschenbach's initial recourse to classicism as his response to Tadzio thus veils an increasingly sensual fascination; eventually the artist begins to acknowledge this 'darker' side to his experience. Exhausted after chasing Tadzio through Venice, he collapses against a well (T 637, just as Foscarina does, F 354), his thoughts confused by feverish agitation. He recalls again the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, contemplating the falsity of the artist's cool approval and deciding that, actually, 'artists are poor teachers, prone to excess'.[38] He muses over the artist's need for Eros as his guide, that 'wir Dichter nicht weise noch würdig sein können'[39] (T 638) and that 'wir notwendig in die Irre gehen, notwendig liederlich und Abenteurer des

[36] John Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 275.
[37] 'shattered'.
[38] Brombert, p. 9.
[39] 'we poets cannot be wise or worthy'.

Gefühles bleiben'[40] (T 638). He exposes the mastery of the artist's style as false, noting that the artist is always drawn to the abyss, straying from dignity and wisdom towards transgression and intoxication. Recalling earlier descriptions of Aschenbach's own style, which was characterised by a rejection of the abyss, it is clear that his encounter with Tadzio has effected a change. Yet the artist's eventual surrender to Eros and the abyss seems tragically inevitable ('notwendig',[41] T 638), and perhaps Tadzio has merely unleashed dormant impulses within Aschenbach, as a catalyst. Regarding this inevitability, Reed states that 'whatever he did – and, more generally, whatever any artist does – must be tragically wrong in one direction or another.'[42] For rejecting one abyss means turning towards another. Here it is 'der Weg der Schönheit'[43] (T 638) that Aschenbach follows, and which leads to danger; 'for it means seeking the spirit through the senses – and can that ever be free of risk?'[44] Aschenbach's earlier classicism is further undermined by a passage from Plato's *Symposium*, which Mann had copied into his notes for *Der Tod in Venedig*: in this passage, as Luke notes, 'the "wise woman" Diotima explains to Socrates how the initiate of Eros, in the end, "turns to the open sea of Beauty"',[45] just as Aschenbach will feel beckoned to the expanse of the ocean by Tadzio before his death.

D'Annunzio's artist is also plagued by creative difficulties at the beginning of *Il fuoco*. A renowned composer and poet, he now seeks fame as a playwright[46] but struggles with the threat of failure and difficulty of expression. His oration in the Doge's Palace reveals his aesthetic principles and hopes: despite diagnosing cultural

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[40] 'we always stray, and always remain immoral and adventurers in emotion'.
[41] 'necessary'.
[42] Reed, 1994, p. 67.
[43] 'the way of beauty'.
[44] Reed, 1994, p. 67.
[45] David Luke, introduction to Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. xlv.
[46] Nicolodi calls him 'il futuro kunstgesamtwerkista italico' ('the future Italian Total Artist'; 'Gesamtkunstwerk' was Wagner's term for his own music-dramas), Fiamma Nicolodi, *Musica italiana del primo novecento: La generazione dell'80* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1981), p. 397.

stagnation he speaks optimistically, trusting in a revival of ancient myth and classical tragedy (translated into the work he will write for this modern age). Before speaking he senses the crowds' 'aspirazione a trascendere l'angustia della vita volgare e a raccogliere i doni dall'eterna Poesia sparsi su le pietre e su le acque'[47] (F 8). The masses, 'oppressi dal tedio e dal travaglio dei lunghi giorni mediocri'[48] (F 8), must recall their ancestors' mastery. Stelio's stirring oration seems to trigger the desired effect, and a poet-friend afterwards comments that 'Almeno per qualche ora [...], a Venezia, il ritmo dell'arte e il polso della vita lian riavuto un medesimo battito'[49] (F 149). Stelio's speech unites art and life, and demonstrates the aestheticisation of life required for a cultural revival in a decaying Venice.

When we first encounter Stelio, his work has no definite shape, and its characters are yet to present themselves to his mind. As we have seen, Foscarina ('la musa dalla voce divulgatrice',[50] F 86) is able to stimulate her lover's creativity and show him visions of his own creations. Her presence fertilises his mind, and he feels like a sculptor: 'Voi riproducete talvolta in me lo stupor religioso di quello statuario'[51] (F 15). This 'religious' sensation involves the sacralisation of the creative process. For, as Stelio exclaims, 'Creare con gioia! È l'attributo della Divinità'[52] (F 107). Creativity and divinity are also linked by Mann: Aschenbach considers Tadzio worthy of 'Anbetung'[53] (T 606), and, in his writing, strives to emulate Zeus' (literal) 'elevation' of Ganymede. Foscarina is similarly transfigured into various classical figures, as examined in Chapter Two above, appearing to Stelio as Cassandra (F 480)

[47] 'aspiration to transcend the narrowness of daily life and to gather the harvest of eternal Poetry scattered on the stones and on the waters'.
[48] 'oppressed by the tedium and hardship of long and monotonous days'.
[49] 'at least for a few hours [...], in Venice, the rhythm of art and the pulse of life beat together'.
[50] 'the muse with the voice that could reveal'.
[51] 'At times you make me feel the religious wonder of the sculptor'.
[52] 'To create with joy! That is the sign of Divinity'.
[53] 'worship'.

and Persephone (F 61), for example. Stelio's words shape her as the hands of a sculptor give form to marble, and listening to him she feels herself become 'passibile di tutte le trasfigurazioni che l'animatore volesse operare su lei'[54] (F 17).

As demonstrated, part of Foscarina's value to Stelio is as an artistic instrument and an actress.[55] She enriches his mind, inspiring creative visions, and can then interpret these tragic themes on the stage. Her inherent melancholic nature and tragic inclinations render her a suitable tool for modern tragedy. One of Foscarina's most important transfigurations is her sudden appearance to Stelio as the protagonist of his tragedy. Here, the extent and nature of their creative collaboration is illustrated: Stelio is 'illuso [...], credendo vedere la sua eroina stessa'[56] (F478). In her presence he envisages the themes and characters of his coming tragedy, and remembers that when composing a previous (and lesser) work, 'il ricordo di voi mi aiutò ad evocare la persona divina, mentre componeva il mio Mistero'[57] (F 22).

In Chapter Three we saw how the sexual union of Stelio and Foscarina is inextricably linked to the artist's creativity: since Foscarina is 'la creatura dionisiaca'[58] (F 308), filled with the ancient and mysterious impulses that hold the key to Stelio's artistic goal, sexual possession of her reawakens these powers. Witt explains that 'the sexual "possession" of women enables the poet to capture Dionysian musicoerotic forces in beautiful Apollinian words – words he uses to dominate and mould [an] [...] audience'.[59] She sees this as an extension of 'Nietzsche's feminization of Dionysus',[60] for the two main components of the 'Trinità

[54] 'subject to all the transfigurations that the creator wished to work upon her'.
[55] Foscarina becomes a material waiting to be 'foggiata seconda le figure della poesia' ('moulded according to the figures of poetry', F 308).
[56] 'deceived [...], believing truly to see his heroine herself'.
[57] 'the memory of you helped me to evoke the divine character, as I composed my Mystery'.
[58] 'the Dionysian creature'.
[59] Witt, 2007, p. 77.
[60] Ibid.

dionisiaca'[61] (F 204) are Foscarina and Donatella Arvale, two different representations of Dionysian women. The actress' heightened passions and maturity contrast with the virginal Donatella, whose 'powers have yet to be awakened'.[62] Although Stelio desires Donatella, he never possesses her sexually; it is his sexual union with Foscarina that unleashes the impulses at the centre of his modern tragedy.

Foscarina is not Stelio's sole source of creative stimulation, however. Venice (whose importance to the artist was considered in greater detail in Chapter One above) represents the ideal locus for the revival of ancient myth and tragedy, and itself stimulates creativity in Stelio. Hence the melody that Stelio perceives on the wind (imperceptible to Daniele Glauro) after his encounter with Wagner.[63] It comes only to Stelio, and only he can translate it into art. The wind intensifies until Stelio is able to grasp the themes developing upon it and channel these into visions of ancient cities (F 284); as the wind combines with other sounds offered by the city, Stelio is 'transported' to Mycenae, and he sees himself as the discoverer of the ancient tombs (F 293). Here, Stelio 'becomes' the protagonist of his coming work, experiencing the same sensations that will be felt by the archaeologist-protagonist of his *La vittoria dell'uomo*.

Stelio's creativity is thus stimulated by both Foscarina and Venice. Just as Tadzio acts as Aschenbach's 'muse', so Foscarina (and even Venice) performs this role for D'Annunzio's artist. As with Aschenbach, Stelio's impulses of creativity

[61] 'the Dionysian Trinity'.
[62] Witt, 2007, p. 77.
[63] Stelio hears 'un tema melodico che si perde e risorge senza avere la forza di svilupparsi' ('a melodic theme that loses itself and returns without the power to develop itself', F 277).

come suddenly ('all'improvviso',[64] F 269) and overwhelm the artist, manifesting themselves in physical excitement.[65]

Yet Aschenbach's object of desire also *hampers* his creativity, distracting from further productivity and conveying him to the abyss; and we have seen that Stelio's experience of desire and creativity is similar, for his troubled and insecure muse also impedes artistic production. Whilst Foscarina's bouts of melancholy render her a valuable instrument for Stelio's tragic art, the insecurities that trigger these bouts also make her burdensome. She perceives competition for her lover's affections, and attempts to claim him exclusively for herself; even Stelio's art is a rival.[66] Foscarina requires constant reassurance of Stelio's love, but is also plagued by guilt: she knows that she must depart and free him if he is to reach his full potential. She promises to do that which 'l'amore non può'[67] (F 243), to serve his creativity unconditionally, and to unburden him of herself. But she struggles to fulfil this painful promise, and at times obstructs the creative process. Her embrace physically suffocates Stelio (and his creativity) (F 236), and he sometimes feels impatient and 'inerte sotto la stretta'[68] (F 239). He sadly asks Foscarina, 'Non volete voi essere un soffio costante per la mia vita e per la mia opera?'[69] (F 160), reminding her of the importance of his artistic task and his need for freedom.

At such times Stelio is haunted by the threat of failure. The story of Seguso, the master glassblower (recounted in Chapter One), consolidates this threat. Remarking on the resemblance between the names of 'Perdilanza' (the lover who

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[64] 'suddenly'.
[65] 'la forza creatrice affluiva al suo spirito come il sangue ai precordio' ('the creative force flowed through his spirit like blood through his heartstrings', F 291).
[66] As seen in the previous chapter, Foscarina feels threatened when Stelio goes to her after hearing a melody on the winds, and jealously asks 'Chi t'ha preso a me?' ('Who has taken you from me?' F 308), sensing that he has experienced something profound without her.
[67] 'love cannot do'.
[68] 'inert within her grasp'.
[69] 'Do you not wish to be a constant inspiration for my life and for my work?'

jealously throws herself into Seguso's mechanism to sabotage it) and 'Perdita', Stelio's joke that he will tie a scarlet thread around his own neck, as a reminder of the importance of his own artistic task, seems brutal and tactless.

When Foscarina eventually departs, it is to allow Stelio the freedom to write his great work, now that the themes and characters have come to him, aided by the actress.[70] She can finally subjugate herself to his work (F 549), and does not depart in bitterness at the end of a failed love affair; Eros is not defeated by art (or vice-versa), but rather placed in its service. Foscarina's departure reins in their potentially destructive erotic desire, freeing the artist. The benefit for the artist of taming Eros is clear as he feels that 'la sua capacità di lavoro parve moltiplicarsi'[71] and considers 'la plenitudine della sue ore a venire'[72] (F 523). For even when geographically separated from him, Foscarina still aids his creativity,[73] and their parting is not permanent. When the time is right they will be reunited in their artistic cause, but until then 'è necessario che ciascuno si trovi pronto al suo posto, [...] venuta l'ora'[74] (F 548). The lovers part optimistically. Even Wagner's funeral at the end of the novel carries an element of hope for the future of art, as 'i tronchi insigni mettevano già i nuovi germogli nella luce di Roma, al romorio delle sorgenti nascoste'[75] (F 560). With the promise of spring, the novel ends.

For D'Annunzio's protagonist the creative process is more gradual than Aschenbach's. Both are overwhelmed by sudden creative impulses, but while Aschenbach's masterly vignette is written during one unbroken stint of inspiration,

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[70] 'Ora che il disegno dell'opera è compiuto, tu non hai bisogno se non di pace per tuo lavoro' ('Now that the form of your composition is complete, all that you need is peace for your work', F 541).
[71] 'his capacity for work seemed to multiply'.
[72] 'the fullness of the hours to come'.
[73] She begs to serve him 'comunque tu voglia ch'io ti serva, [...] da vicino, da lontano' ('however you wish me to serve you, from close at hand or from far away', F 224).
[74] 'it is necessary that each should be ready in their place, [...] when the time comes'.
[75] 'the illustrious trunks were already putting forth their new buds in the light of Rome, at the murmur of hidden springs'.

Stelio's great work is of a lengthier conception and execution. Biological imagery likens the creation of his work to gestation. At the beginning of the novel Stelio's forehead is 'gonfia d'un mondo non partorito'[76] (F 75), implying a mind filled with yet unformed themes, which will be fertilised by his interaction with Foscarina, the complement participant in the conception of his work. Such collaborative creativity is absent from Aschenbach's experience, and even when recalling the dialogues of Plato and Plutarch, he is the only participant. Nevertheless, it is 'interaction' with, or reaction to, Tadzio that triggers his hours of brief but intense productivity.

[76] 'swollen with a world not yet born'.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The relationship between Eros and creativity forms a crucial parallel between *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco*. We have seen how each text recounts an experience of desire, and how this experience affects the creative process. Interaction with an object of desire drives but also hinders the creative process.

The object of desire acts as a 'muse', inspiring the artist to create. To Aschenbach, Tadzio's perfect beauty recalls classical sculpture, epic poetry, music and ancient myth. The writer begins to think 'artistically', and is suddenly inspired to write – but only in Tadzio's presence, and only briefly. Similarly, Foscarina inspires visions of classical tragedy in Stelio, and allows him to 'see' the characters of his coming work in vivid transfigurations. She enables him to create and to feel part of the classical traditions that he aims to revive in his work, which will eventually lead to a rejuvenation of art.

The muse, however, also exerts an erotic attraction for the artists, which can overwhelm their function as artistic instrument. Aschenbach eventually abandons art and creativity, forsaking all work as his obsession with Tadzio consumes him; eventually he can do nothing but stalk the youth through the city. Stelio's neglect of art occurs more spasmodically, and the alternation of his devotion to art and abandonment of it for Eros is almost cyclical. Foscarina's insecurities and jealousies demand that Stelio neglects his artistic work to reassure his lover, and we find him (literally) trapped beneath the burdensome weight of his lover as she embraces him, becoming inert and frustrated (F 239). He must also fight the potentially destructive impulses of erotic desire that encourage him to surrender everything for the sake of physical pleasure. At such times Eros seems dominant in his struggle with creative productivity. The crippling and destructive potential

of Eros common to both texts is illustrated in strikingly similar scenarios, such as the well scenes, in which Foscarina and Aschenbach collapse at the foot of a well, exhausted and feverish after an agitation caused by their obsessive desire.

The experiences of Aschenbach and Stelio are set in Venice, a crucial common thematic strand. The city is a pervasive presence in both texts, at times displaying the prominence of a character. Stelio feels inspiration come to him from the city itself, even as a melody carried on the wind, and exclaims that no other city has such power to stimulate human creativity. It is Venice that grants Aschenbach a view of such perfect beauty in Tadzio, and provides him with a stage on which to admire his anatomy (at the Lido); but it is Venice, too, that conceals Tadzio within its labyrinthine streets and beyond the crests of bridges when Aschenbach attempts to pursue him, no longer caring about his reputation or moral standing. In both cases Venice is filled with death and decay, and we see direct parallels in the imagery used: for both Aschenbach and Stelio, the Venetian gondola becomes Charon's ferry across the Styx, hinting at deliverance to the Underworld.

A marked difference between Mann's and D'Annunzio's portrayals of the struggle between Eros and the creative process emerges when we consider the resolutions of *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Il fuoco*. While D'Annunzio tames Eros and eventually grants his artist space to create in freedom, Mann's protagonist is irretrievably overwhelmed by the desire he experiences, neglecting his creative labours. By the end, 'Aschenbach cannot sustain his artistic discipline to capture the beauty of life and to transcend it, as he was once able to do in the outstanding prose written at the beach';[1] henceforth he fails to channel into writing the sensations that Tadzio stimulates, abandoning restraint and self-control for delirium

[1] Mundt, p. 95.

and recklessness. He is delivered to Dionysus by the hands of Eros, embracing chaos and intoxication in his departure from his hitherto (excessively) Apollinian existence.

Stelio seems to be saved by his awareness of the struggle between desire and creativity, and understands that total embrace of one comes at the expense of the other. Success in his epic artistic undertaking will require a sublimation of Eros, that power which threatens to overwhelm all other impulses. Unlike Aschenbach, Stelio succeeds in placing Eros in the service of art.

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