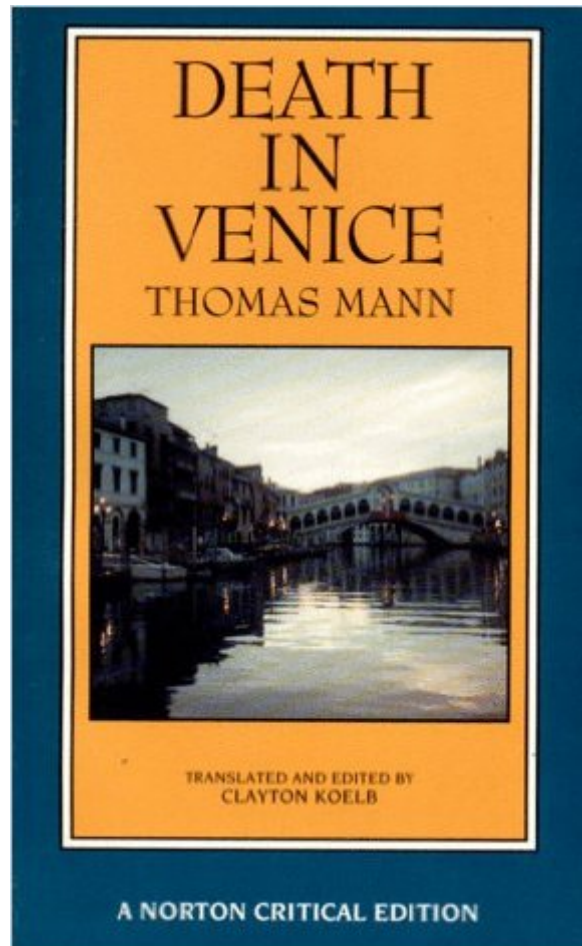


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Death In Venice (A Norton Critical Edition)



Synopsis

Thomas Mann is widely acknowledged as the greatest German novelist of this century. His 1912 novella *Death in Venice* is the most frequently read example of Mann's early work. Clayton Koelb's masterful translation improves upon its predecessors in two ways: it renders Mann into American (not British) English, and it remains true to Mann's original text without sacrificing fluency. For American readers, this is the translation of choice. "Backgrounds and Contexts" includes Mann's working notes, which allow students to observe the author's creative process. The notes are available here for the first time in English. Illuminating selections from Mann's essays and letters are also reprinted, as are period maps of Munich, Venice, and the Lido. "Criticism" includes six essays by Andre von Gronicka, Manfred Dierks, T. J. Reed, Dorrit Cohn, David Luke, and Robert Tobin sure to stimulate classroom discussion. A Chronology and Selected Bibliography are also included.

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Customer Reviews

For those legions of readers who consider Thomas Mann's *DEATH IN VENICE* one of the pinnacles of 20th Century literature, welcome to the feast! Michael Henry Heim has restudied and again translated this brief but poignant novella with an English version more in tune with Mann's novella and certainly, finally free from all the societal homophobic restrictions that have shrouded previous translations. This is the tale of a writer - Gustav von Aschenbach - in his fifties who feels the need for exotic travels to break his writer's block, and after many aborted attempts to find the right place,

comes to Venice and not only falls under its spell but also finds his sublimated desires for pure beauty as focused on young men awakened in his encounter with the young Polish boy Tadzio. This story has been translated into other languages, transformed into film by Luchino Visconti and made into the last opera of Sir Benjamin Britten. But though the simple story has captivated our minds for many years, it has never been presented in so eloquent a fashion as in this Heim translation. To wit: "On a personal level, too, art is life intensified: it delights more deeply, consumes more rapidly; it engraves the traces of imaginary and intellectual adventure on the countenance of its servant and in the long run, for all the monastic calm of his external existence, leads to self-indulgence, over refinement, lethargy, and a restless curiosity that a lifetime of wild passions and pleasures could scarcely engender." When he first encounters Tadzio "...he was infused with a paternal affection, the attraction that one who begets beauty by means of self-sacrifice [a writer] feels for one who is inherently beautiful." And "Was it not common knowledge that the sun diverts our attention from the intellectual to the sensual?"

I don't have much more to add to Grady Harp's effusive praise, except to say that I pretty much agree with his main points. I first read the classic H.T. Lowe Porter translation in college and liked it then . . . anything for a thorough expose of what it means--or necessarily used to mean--to be gay and aging. Even Lowe Porter's fusty Edwardian strains, imparting dignity and Olympian tragedy to the drama, seemed apt at the time for a life--in the middle of another pestilence--that seemed to offer no happy ending. But since then we've had Will and Grace and countless gay characters, mostly minor, in films and on TV--and one of the great things is that it's okay to laugh about it all. Even at what we in the community used to call tragic and sometimes in our bitchier moments still do. This translation invites us to smile, and even occasionally howl. By giving Aschenbach an obsession with the Greek gods (toward the end he uses the words god and godlike about a dozen times in two pages), Mann not only shows us what was required at the time as a good alibi or cover for homosexual tendencies (not even "identities")--"classical culture" and "noble classicism" and so on: everything that involved nude boys and swimming hole frolics and attention served to youth and beauty in young beauties--but also gave us in the future (inadvertantly, I don't know, since I don't read German) the keys to understanding a period in which so-called bourgeois culture needed its literature and high art to justify the ancients' curious sexual habits. An almost neurasthenic obsession with youth and health and beauty being an ironic side feature of cultured life.

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