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DEADLY SECRETS:

DISEASE MOTIFS IN THOMAS MANN'S TOD IN VENEDIG

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ABSTRACT

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In Thomas Mann's 1911 novella, Tod in Venedig, two disease motifs become steadily more prevalent throughout the work: epidemic cholera and what was then viewed as a degenerative illness, homosexuality. The similarities of these two themes are used to underscore the idea that secrecy, in certain situations where it is expected, may in fact be the most harmful response.

This paper approaches the thesis from several vantage points: It first examines the historical evolution of twentieth-century views of both homosexuality and cholera, with particular focus upon their social and political ramifications during the years just prior to Mann's writing Tod in Venedig. Second, it documents Mann's personal knowledge of both, and his interest in them. Third, reflections in the text of the social and historical background, as well as Mann's views are examined.

Using authentic documents, recent studies, Mann's letters and his recently published personal diaries, Tod in Venedig is examined not only as a literary work, but also as a personal document. The struggle with homosexual inclinations faced by Aschenbach, the protagonist of Tod in Venedig, was faced by Mann in his own lifetime. Both Aschenbach and

Venice suffer the disastrous results of suppressing some important knowledge; Aschenbach suppresses the knowledge of his homosexual inclinations and the city suppresses knowledge of a cholera outbreak. The tragic end suffered by Aschenbach after the continued suppression of his homosexual inclinations is reinforced by Venice "dying" around him.

Cholera thus becomes a vehicle, through which Mann examines the consequences of suppression in Tod in Venedig. The implications of this theme can be easily extended to apply to Mann's own life, as he dealt to a certain extent with his homosexual inclinations in Tod in Venedig.

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Thomas Mann's Novelle Tod in Venedig, written in 1911, when the author was 36 years old, achieved immediate acclaim in his native Germany. Translated into many languages, it soon received the same enthusiastic reception internationally. It is considered to belong to the canon of great literature today. In Tod in Venedig, Thomas Mann alludes, both directly and indirectly, to the works of other writers and philosophers, historical events, ancient beliefs and customs as well as modern social concerns. Using personal experiences and his own philosophies as a basis for much of the work, he wove a complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered novella. It is undoubtedly this complexity which has made Tod in Venedig the subject of intense scholarly fascination and detailed scrutiny since its appearance. Every new study, examining Tod in Venedig through different eyes and with a different focus, can shed light upon the work, its author, and the dynamic era in which the novella was conceived and written.

This paper will focus upon the theme of disease in Tod in Venedig, looking at Mann's representation of two current topics: cholera and homosexuality. The social and historical perception of those two topics, Thomas Mann's own experience with them, and his known reactions will be discussed. In light of these observations, Mann's representation of both cholera and homosexuality in Tod in Venedig will be analyzed. The analysis will focus upon a continuing motif which connects these two themes: the

potentially disastrous results of suppression of knowledge, brought about by socially expected and enforced secrecy. Cholera becomes a vehicle, which Mann uses to examine the consequences of suppression. He invites us to consider that, contrary to Christian teachings, suppression of knowledge (truth) at the level of society (the city) can lead to dire consequences, as surely as suppression at the level of the individual.

The story is of a renowned, aging German writer trying to finish his masterpiece, who is drawn southward to Venice from where he never returns. During his stay he experiences feelings and sensations of an erotic and chaotic nature, which he has until that time never allowed himself to feel. His literary success thus far has been won at the expense of these feelings, which the author has firmly suppressed and sublimated. But, once he relinquishes control over them, allowing himself to admire the beauty of a young boy, he is unable or unwilling to return to his former controlled, passionless life. Afraid of people's reactions to his feelings, he hides them. Growing increasingly obsessed with them, while struggling to keep them secret, his inner turmoil finally begins to show. He begins to appear undignified and silly, the very appearance that he had feared and had led him to secrecy in the first place. He is caught in a humiliating downward spiral, fear for his reputation bringing about more and more foolish actions in ever-weakening attempts to maintain his secrecy. His ultimate physical demise comes as no surprise and seems to the reader to be the only plausible end.

Along the same lines is the theme of suppression by city authorities in Venice of evidence of a cholera outbreak. They, too, are unwilling to risk the harm that public knowledge of this outbreak might do the city. When it is finally discovered by observant outsiders, who then flee for fear of their lives, the delay caused by the continued suppression of this knowledge has allowed the disease to gain a greater foothold in the city. The initial outbreak, potentially containable by practical measures and prevention education, because of citizen's ignorance, has spread throughout the whole city and become a catastrophe of epidemic proportions. Exactly what the authorities initially feared, does in fact happen. Panic spreads. The city is abruptly deserted by the tourists and abandoned by trade. The city's symbolic death reflects and underscores Aschenbach's death, as he and Venice die of what they see as necessarily hidden realities.

Discussions and writings about both cholera and homosexuality have occupied scholars throughout the centuries. Both Hippocrates and Galen wrote in classic Greece of cholera, and records survive of cholera-like epidemics in ancient eastern lands. Descriptions of cholera-like plagues are found in a collection of Indian legends dating from the early sixteenth century. With the increasing colonization by Western powers of Asiatic lands, cholera became a disease that affected more and more Europeans, particularly soldiers. Through colonization and wars, cholera slowly began to move westward, and a major pandemic struck Europe around 1817.

By 1829, a second cholera pandemic had reached European Russia, and

advanced through the Baltic Provinces and Poland. Spread by troops of the Russian armies, the disease ravaged the populations of Hungary and Austria. It took its toll in Prussia, moving then to England via nautical trade routes, then to France, from where it spread to Ireland. The great cholera epidemic of 1832 in the U.S. and Canada is thought to have begun when infected ships brought the germ from Irish ports. Once cholera had a foothold in the western world, it did not soon let go. Thus, the disease primarily of poor, "uncivilized", unhygenic countries became for approximately one hundred years of utmost concern to Europeans and inhabitants of the New World.

Throughout the 19th century, epidemic cholera swept through European lands almost every eight years. The disease struck with such ferocity that its death toll was always high. During that century it was impossible not to be aware of or fear cholera. A third pandemic raged in the early 1850s, carried initially once again by the transport of troops, this time during the Crimean War. A fourth pandemic struck in the early 1860s, another in the early 1880s and another at the start of the 1900s. This time, however, the fatalities in western countries were not nearly as high as the millions who had perished previously, because much had been learned about the disease. Over the next few decades, most of Western Europe had only sporadic outbreaks. However, European Russia still had a great problem with cholera, with over 230,000 cases reported in 1910. Russian gypsies were blamed that year for importing cholera to the southern half of Italy, resulting in 1,400 victims within a few weeks. In 1911, the disease manifested itself

throughout Italy, killing 6,100 (Pollitzer 43, 59). Despite these outbreaks, by the turn of the century, the incidence of cholera in Western European countries had lessened to such an extent that it was no longer perceived to be a major threat to humanity. By 1883, the great physician Robert Koch had discovered the cause of cholera, the "comma" bacillus, *Vibrio cholerae,* , and a vaccine and more effective treatments had been developed shortly thereafter to combat the disease. Nonetheless, the sensational image of cholera was not completely dispelled; fear, revulsion and secrecy still surrounded it. Although cholera had begun to be less feared in Western countries, in more tropical lands, cholera fatalities were still high (Pollitzer 11-50). Though causing considerably less havoc than on previous occasions, cholera at times during [the first decade of the twentieth century] assumed quite serious proportions in central and south eastern Europe" (Pollitzer).[1] Thus, despite these advances cholera was still a real concern in 1911, when Thomas Mann wrote Tod in Venedig.

Homosexuality, likewise, had a long and controversial history by the time Mann wrote Tod in Venedig. Accepted in ancient Greece as another normal aspect of sexuality, homosexuality seems to have been no cause for objection, especially among the priveliged classes (Effe 155). Since classical times, homosexuality has become less accepted. The church officially frowned upon it, but a more important source of proscription came from the increasing control exerted by the state during the Enlightenment, as explained by Isabel Hull in "Sexualität und bürgerliche Gesellschaft." The state, she

argues, began to control sexuality insofar as it affected the state's functions, specifically its monetary health:

> Die Kirche richtete ihr Augenmark vordringlich auf den inneren Menschen und seinen/ihren Seelen zustand, während sich der Staat primär mit der äußeren Ordnung beschäftigte und vor allem an den fiskalischen Resultaten "unsittlichen" Verhaltens Anstoß nahm. (51)

The state began imposing explicit laws upon its citizens regulating sexual behavior. A Bavarian official explained in 1794 that the concern with sexual activity should not be in suppressing it, rather in regulating it for the good of the state (Hull 55). As Michel Foucault writes about this era in The History of Sexuality:

> Things went from ritual lamenting over the unfruitful debauchery of the rich, bachelors, and libertines to a discourse in which the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention; there was a progression from the crudely populationist arguments of the mercantilist epoch to the much more subtle and calculated attempts at regulation that tended to favor or discourage --according to the objectives and exigencies of the moment -- an increasing birthrate. (26)

As Hull writes, sexuality became a public issue. It was discussed openly by priests, doctors and pedagogues throughout Europe. In Germany, these men, particularly pedagogues, flooded the land with books and articles, founded schools and educated teachers. Their publications were eagerly read by the educated public. Called Philanthropes by their contemporaries, these men were also later called "sex educators", because they were convinced that sexuality had a central influence upon the development of human character and personality. Thus, they argued, sexuality deserved the thorough attention of educators (57).

Study and control of sexuality remained a topic of intense interest in the 19th century, and many scientific and legal publications as well as popular writings were devoted to this topic. Notable among them was Psychopathia Sexualis, by the physician Richard von Krafft-Ebing, first published in 1886. By that time, the fascination with "sexual deviancy" and normalcy was so strong, that edition after edition of this collection of hundreds of case studies of "unusual sexual behavior or interests" appeared in the original and in translation (Greenberg 414 and Robinson iv). Despite the fact that his book was written for physicians with the most "exciting parts" in Latin, the public, as Victor Robinson wrote in the introduction to the twelfth edition (1939), "swooped down on [Krafft-Ebings's] book and [since] has held it to their collective bosom" (Robinson iv, vii).

Both the disease, cholera, and the disposition, homosexuality, came under close scrutiny during the 19th century as desperate attempts were made by frightened bourgeois politicians, educators, scientists and ministers to understand their causes and eradicate them. As with many "social ills" of the day, both cholera and homosexuality aroused strong reactions in the general populace, many of whom feared that they would contract the conditions themselves. From that fear arose wild stories of how "afflicted" persons behaved, how they themselves had contracted their illness, and how the disease was passed on. Cholera and homosexuality were both, quite simply, not understood.

The cause of cholera was a topic of dispute for most of the 19th century.

As discussed in David Reese's A Plain and Practical Treatise of the Epidemic Cholera of 1833, the idea of the disease being caused by a "contagion"[2] was scoffed at by many renowned physicians of the 19th century. The cause, they said, was far more complex. They questioned how anyone could believe, as common people did, that a disease could be caused by this so-called contagion, which was not even discernible to the human senses. This mysterious disease must obviously be caused by a combination of conditions. Out of this belief grew the idea of "stages" of cholera.

The common understanding, which these physicians extolled and spread among the lay people, was that the first stage, which was actually just a phase of susceptibility, was caused by breathing bad air or miasmata. This bad atmosphere collected over concentrations of population and was due to decomposing organic matter, heat, barometric conditions, meteorological conditions, and occasionally even the tide. This stage might be detectable through the "premonitory conditions" (tiredness, slight fever, indigestion) which might develop, or there might be no symptoms at all. Thus, according to Reese, anyone could be walking about in a susceptible condition, and not know it (17-18).

The second phase, or "true cholera" would, however, only set in if someone who already had the "precondition" aggravated it with imprudent behavior. These "exciting causes" which would bring on the cholera included eating certain vegetables and fruits, lobster, crab, alchohol, cheese, and taking certain opiums and medicines. Essentially then, Reese was saying that the

cholera victim had only himself and his own actions to blame for his illness, a view that was, of course, often typical of Christian thought.

This understanding of cholera, its so-called "stages", the "exciting causes" of the disease, and even the personal responsibility the cholera victims had to assume for their illness are remarkably similiar to the way in which homosexuality was regarded in the 19th century. Indeed, it was only in the 19th century that the medical community first began to concern itself with the "disease" of homosexuality. The theory that homosexuality was due to a gradual degeneration of family lines through the generations began to gain acceptance. B.A. Morel, a great proponent of the degeneracy theory around 1857-60, postulated that "many medical, psychiatric and social problems were due to the deterioration of the human body from an initially perfect state, under the impact of an unhealthy environment" (Greenberg 411-12). The pathologies were brought about by poverty, alchohol and poor diet, a complex of factors reminiscent of what was supposed to bring on cholera. This weakened condition was inherited, genetically producing more degenerate offspring with each generation. These theories were popularized not only through the novels of Emil Zola and others, but also through pamphlets explaining it and through dozens of journal articles by physicians in Europe and America (Greenberg 412-13). Rooted in Darwinian thought and potentially eugenic[3] in its application, Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis was especially important, as it was the first major work to label homosexuality a degenerative and thus pathologic condition.

Degeneracy of a family was considered a possible "precondition" for homosexuality. Degeneracy could manifest itself as insanity, criminality or sexual aberration. And as Krafft-Ebing wrote, most cases of degeneracy were inherited and this degeneracy merely manifested itself as homosexuality (Greenberg 414). This existing, inherited "precondition" for homosexuality did not necessarily develop into the full blown "disease". It was by personal actions that homosexuality developed. Krafft-Ebing attributed the cause of development of homosexual "aberation" "very frequently" to masturbation in youth, thus changing "normally developing sexual instinct", which is "aesthetic, ideal, pure and free impulse which draws the opposite sexes together", to one which is a "coarse, animal desire for sexual satisfaction" (286-7). By the end of the century, the "predisposition" toward homosexuality was also believed to manifest itself through seduction by an older man (Gilman 266). The renowned physician and defender of homosexual rights, Havelock Ellis, underscored this position when he noted at the turn of the century that homosexuality could be acquired (Greenberg 411).

Scandals and persecutions of homosexuals at the end of the century provide evidence for the mounting fear of homosexuality, as the belief that it was communicable or teachable was widely accepted (Greenberg 400). Elaborate social, medical and pedagogical taboos evolved to prevent children from masturbating and to combat the development and spread of homosexuality. Foucault catalogues a list of precautions which were taken to

assure that schoolboys did not have improper influences from or contact with others, including preventing students from congregating when they relieved themselves and constructing illuminated sleeping chambers with partitions between the beds (28).

Even if "predisposed" to degenerative illnesses, it was believed that with sufficient will power one could prevent its manifestation as a disease. If one could not muster the will power to resist "becoming" a homosexual, one was considered to be somehow lacking or ill. Here, the idea of the so-called "diseases of the will" played an important role. Krafft-Ebing diagnosed the degenerative ailment "Abulia", i.e. loss of will power in many of his patients, especially homosexual men[4]. As John H. Smith described it in his recent study:

> A set of oppositions between impulse and inhibition, normalcy and perversity, activity and passivity develops around the will such that the extremes define "illness" and yet make a middle position impossible. Especially the clinical creation of paralyzing choices between "sexualities", namely between heterosexuality based on repression and a homosexuality defined as involuntary, implants into the male will its self destruction. (103)

Through the writings of William Griesinger in the mid 1880s the concept of Abulia quickly became widespread. His textbook, which had five editions, is said to be the basis for much of Freud's work on the Ego (Smith 104). As the notion of "diseases of the will" became popular, the final blame for the development of the "disease" of homosexuality, as with cholera, fell onto the "weak-willed" patient, and the association of these "diseases" with people who were somehow morally inferior became clear. As Richard J.

Evans writes in his study of the political and social effects of the cholera epidemics in Prussia, "the association of cholera with individual immorality [in the 1830s] was thus expressed in the very theories which medical men developed to account for it"(248), again, a practice akin to Christian explanations for disease. Receptivity to cholera was said to increase through emotional excesses, lack of self-restraint, and excessive indulgence in alchohol:

> The discourse to which this ineradicable belief in the connection between alchohol and cholera ultimately belonged was the familiar one that ascribed illness and disease above all to moral weakness and lack of self-control, and linked them both to poverty as evidence that the unequal distribution of wealth and health was fundamentally the responsibility of the individual rather than of society as a whole. (Evans 248)

Because homosexuality and cholera were considered to derive from immorality and degeneracy, the victims were held responsible for their "conditions". They were looked upon with repugnance, disgust and condemnation. The step from this condemnation and stereotyping to prejudices was an easy one. Many cholera victims, who were already looked down upon with disgust, were also blamed for their pathetic social condition. Many of the first case studies of homosexuality had been conducted on those who were incarcerated in prisons or madhouses, and were already considered insane or criminal, and hence all the easier to condemn (Foucault 38-9). [5]

The physical appearance of cholera victims and the supposed appearance of homosexuals was terrifying, as well. The image of the physically repulsive homosexual had a long history. The anonymously

written Onania: or, The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution of 1700, and Samuel Auguste Andre David Tissot's dissertation on the same topic, which was translated into German in 1785, discussed "masturbatory disease" as a prime cause of many diseases, including insanity and, of course, homosexuality (Gilman, Sexuality 207). Homosexuality was believed at the time to be a further development of "masturbatory disease", which had many visible outward symptoms. One of these was always the inablity to speak in a masculine manner. The ultimate result of "masturbatory disease", with all of its suspected terrifying consequences: blindness, pockmarked skin, madness and a wasting away and ultimately death from uselessly spent energy, is similiar to what must have been the most terrifying aspect of cholera, the physical ravages to the victim's body. With cholera, however, the physical appearance changed much more quickly. It was not unusual for someone who had been feeling perfectly healthy in the morning to be dead of the cholera by nightfall. Victims changed appearance so horribly within a few hours, that they were almost unrecognizable. The final indignations of shrivelling and color change to an almost blackish-blue (resulting from a drastic loss of the victim's body fluids through uncontrollable vomiting and diarrhea) were signs of the final stages of the disease and the imminent death.

As with most illnesses (as evidenced by attitudes toward AIDs today) the cholera was often seen as a punishment visited upon its victims and the affected city. The populace responded accordingly. During the Hamburg epidemic of 1892, preachers took advantage of the suddenly-filled churches to

preach of duty, obedience and faithfulness (Evans 358-9). The same moral connection was made with homosexuality. Krafft-Ebing wrote that "the episodes of moral decay always coincide with the progression of effeminacy, lewdness and luxurience of the nations" (6). Both scourges - the immorality and its resulting diseases - were blamed upon modern society: "These phenomena can only be ascribed to the higher and more stringent demands which circumstances make upon the nervous system . . . Large cities are hotbeds in which neuroses and low morality are bred" (Krafft-Ebing 7). Despite the moral (self-imposed) aspect of developing cholera and homosexuality, their somatic (non-moral) causes were believed to be treatable. Thus, it was left to physicians to treat both homosexuality and cholera.

Although relegating cholera to a medical realm seems logical today, the medicalization of homosexuality, which began in the nineteenth century, does not immediately make sense. The fundamental opposition to "abnormal" sex was not new. New, however, was the scientific terminology with which it was described was, as was the transfer of social responsibility for homosexuality from the legal realm into the medical one. The medical community's new self-appointed responsibilities included the identification and labelling of these supposedly pathological conditions, and the discovery of their physiological or somatic causes. The growing view of homosexuality as a medical condition had widespread implications. Homosexuals were treated and viewed as "diseased" but potentially "curable" individuals.

Treatment and preventive measures were then performed by physicians or under their supervision. Doctors, who had always been called upon from time to time to "illuminate" court cases, began offering unsolicited opinions, exerting influence in the legal arena without being asked.

After 1879, especially in America, physicians played a particularly important role within their newly claimed realm of power, in campaigning for legislation illegalizing certain forms of sexual behavior (Greenberg 398-401). Why physicians wanted to exert more influence in controlling "deviant" sexuality is still a matter of contention, but it is clear that the profession in general had only to gain by greater influence and additional patients. And the medical advances made during the nineteenth century by men such as Pasteur and Koch (who discovered the cholera bacillus) had given the physician a prestige and trustworthiness not before enjoyed by the profession. One medical conclusion, that homosexuals were born with the ("degenerative") tendancy toward homosexuality, and had not willingly chosen their "deviant" orientation, was an attractive position for early homosexual rights activists fighting against the criminalization of homosexuality. This position was also propounded by many influential members of homosexual rights groups. These theories were well-known, especially among homosexuals: "Educated inverts [homosexuals] devoured this literature [articles about the medical causes of homosexuality] and some were strongly influenced by it", including Oscar Wilde and Radclyffe Hall (Greenberg 417). Virchow's Cell Theory and the discovery that many illnesses

were caused by unseen organisms led ever more to the search for invisible, hidden causes of disease. Thus the "focus of the new medicine, especially of the new sexuality [of the late 19th and early 20th centuries] was on the hidden within, the unseen motivators of disease and pathological change" (Gilman, Sexuality 233-35), and as greater acceptance of this psychoanalytic thought was gained, it increasingly permeated the medical discourse of homosexuality.

Freud's influential psychological discourse about homosexuality developed largely from late nineteenth century neurologic and psychiatric thought,but represented "a radical departure from the somatic emphasis of nineteenth century theories of degeneration or evolution", and focused on purely psychological explanations of homosexuality (Greenberg 398). The degeneracy theory, which had also been used in anti-semitic campaigns was, of course, distasteful to Freud (who was Jewish), and soon began to be abandoned by other physicians, as well (Greenberg 422-23). Krafft-Ebing, who had earned a reputation for his writings on the "disease" homosexuality, changed his convictions at the turn of the century, despite the fact that the "disease" concept was still the prevailing belief. In 1901, he published his new view in the Annual for Sexual Intermediate Stages. There he stated that, regarding "inversion" (one contemporary term for homosexuality), it had become "impossible to maintain . . . the idea of a disease". He regarded it, instead, merely as a "congenital anamoly" (Robinson vii-viii). Finally, in 1905, Freud stated that homosexuality is not an illness (Greenberg 426). Thus, by 1911, when Tod in Venedig was written, the "disease" status of

homosexuality had been forcefully contested.

This is not to say that homosexuality had disappeared from the public consciousness. Far from it. Homosexual rights movements had been growing for half a century. The public could not have avoided learning about the current status of homosexuality, not only because of the increasing strength of these movements, but also because of the political and social backlash instigated by them. Around 1896, homosexual journals began appearing, and in 1897, a committee formed by a group of some of the most prominent homosexual rights activists in Germany, called the "*Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee*" (Scientific Humanitarian Commitee) began circulating a petition for amendment of paragraph 175 of the German penal code, which outlawed all homosexual acts. Among the more prominent signers of this petition were Krafft-Ebing, Gerhard Hauptman, Rainer Maria Rilke, Karl Jaspers, Herman Hesse, Stefan Zweig, Lou-Andreas Salomé, Carl Maria Weber, and notably, Heinrich and Thomas Mann (Steakley 30,65).[6] A brochure about homosexuality published by the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, entitled Was soll das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen? (What Should the People know about the Third Sex) first appeared in Germany in 1901. It was revised several times and by 1914, fifty thousand copies had been distributed.

Political scandals, too, brought attention to the subject of homosexuality. The 1895 arrest of the English poet Oscar Wilde on charges of homosexuality attracted much attention in Germany, and the prestigious

journal Die Neue Zeit published articles defending him (Lauritsen and Thorstad 58). In 1906 a group of close advisors to the Kaiser were accused of homosexuality in a newspaper story in what came to be known as the Moltke-Eulenberg affair. The actual charge was that Prince Philip zu Eulenberg had "put together a clique around the Kaiser that was up to political intrigues," which was tied together by mysticism and sexual inclinations that were "repugnant to prevailing norms". This attack was actually leveled more at the Kaiser himself, than at Eulenberg, intending to discredit the monarch merely by associating him with homosexuality (Lauritsen and Thorstad 19,21).

Around the same time, Prince Friedrich Heinrich of Prussia was brought to court on charges of homosexuality. German newspapers were full of the story, and suddenly "an anti-homosexual witchhunt of unparalleled proportions" began (Steakley 37). Many high ranking government officials and military officers were accused of homosexuality. The accusation that Bernhard von Bülow, the chancellor of Germany, was homosexual started a series of trials that dragged on until halfway through 1909 (Steakley 38).

Thomas Mann was aware of homosexuals' struggles, as is evidenced by a letter he wrote to his brother Heinrich in April, 1912: "I just remembered an incident: Someone was actually released [from the military] as unfit because he announced to the Chief Reserve Commission that he was homosexual. Couldn't you weave that in [to your work]?" (Mann, Letters 59). He was, however, cautious about too-obvious, or too-close associations with

homosexual groups, as his correspondences with Franz Strunz, leader of the homosexual emancipation group of Vienna, "Urania", show. In early 1912, he requested that his presentation to the group consist only of a reading of his work, but a week later he backed out entirely, citing pecuniary reasons for his cancellation (Mann, Briefwechsel 149). Less than a year later, he worried in a letter to his friend, Jakob Wassermann, whether reading to this group "vielleicht eine Schande ist", and asked him to please let him know how the group was viewed in Vienna (Mann, Briefwechsel 174).

Publicity about homosexuality at the beginning of the twentieth century was widespread and the hysteria which homosexuality caused was taken seriously enough to be used as a political weapon. Public reaction to a private, usually secret, personal affair could, in short, be used to weaken, even perhaps to topple governments or, at the very least, to ruin individual careers.

Cholera, one of the most feared diseases of the nineteenth century, had played quite a remarkable role in the German politics, as well. Evans' Death in Hamburg (obviously reminiscent of the translated title of Mann's work, Death in Venice), points out some of the factors, most notably, the cholera, which precipitated a move toward "Prussianism" in Hamburg in the 1890s (566). Evans claims that a secretive, dishonest and inefficient city government contributed to the horrible outbreak of cholera in Hamburg in 1892, the only city in all of Western Europe to have a major epidemic that year (296). Hamburg's city government did not react any differently to that

epidemic than it had to the epidemics of 1832 and 1848, although remarkable scientific gains had been made in knowledge of the disease since those years. Virtually nothing was done in 1892 to combat or prevent the spread of the disease (Evans 251). In a chapter most appropriately entitled "From concealment to catastrophe", Evans relates the official statistics for that epidemic, which show that more than 20,000 people, or over 13.4 % of Hamburg's population died, an estimate which is very likely low (293-95). The tragedy of this epidemic lay mostly in that fact that it could, in all likelihood, have been prevented. Had the presence of the disease in the city been acknowledged, instead of denied and hidden, and proper steps taken to publicize the presence of the deadly bacteria, preventative steps could have been taken to combat it. The outbreak could have been contained before it reached epidemic proportions.

This epidemic, humiliating and embarrassing as it was, was not soon forgotten: "Hamburg's government was tried at the bar of local, national and even international public opinion in 1892, and found wanting" (Evans 565). Thus, this cholera epidemic "highlighted and symbolized the helplessness of the political notables in the face of the challenge posed by the social and environmental consequences of rapid industrial and urban growth, and demonstrated, with a graphic and shocking immediacy, the inadequacy of classical liberal political and administrative practice. . ." (Evans 565-6). Evans maintains that, as a result, the old system of "amateur government" and *laissez-faire* policies disappeared, and Prussianism and state intervention

triumphed (viii).

International reaction to the outbreak was swift and condemning. Evans lists no fewer then seven newspapers in Germany and England blaming the "inaction", "apathy", "secretiveness", etc. of authorities in dealing with the cholera for the outbreak of the epidemic. As is apparent from the dates of these reports, which range from the 25th to the 28th of August, while the epidemic peaked on the 26th. Hamburg was subjected to negative international publicity was focused immediately (Evans 305-6).

Thomas Mann, born in 1875, was seventeen years old at the time and lived in Lübeck, less than 40 miles from Hamburg. As son of a senator, he would have been aware of the political and social turmoil in the neighboring city, and of it's manifold causes and consequences.

Mann could also not have overlooked the presence and effects of cholera in Italy many years later. He had a long history of visits to Italy, first travelling there as a twenty-year old in 1895, and returning numerous times. By his 1911 trip, which inspired Tod in Venedig, he had developed a very special affection for Italy, and for Venice in particular (Jonas1). He spent time there during the summers of 1909 and 1911 (Jonas 2-3), when there were considerable outbreaks of cholera.

An interested, intelligent man, Mann could hardly have avoided thinking about disease and death in this political and social backdrop, although his personal life must have brought about the same sort of reflections on death, as well. His sister, Carla, committed suicide in July of

1910 and his wife, Katia was quite ill and in a sanitorium during the writing of Tod in Venedig (Mann, Letters 57). Mann has quite plainly said that Tod in Venedig is based upon real happenings, and that, in writing it, all he did was fill in the details. In a lecture in 1940, he discussed the inspirations for the novella:

> In Wahrheit ist jede Arbeit zwar fragmentarische aber in sich geschlossene Verwirklichung unseres Wesens. . . . Wie im jugendlichen Tonio Kröger ist auch im Tod in Venedig kein Zug erfunden: der Verdächtige Gondolier, der Knabe Tadzio und die seinen, die durch Gepäckverwechslung mißglückte Abreise, die Cholera, der ehrliche Clerk im Reisebüro, der bösartige Bänkelsänger – alles war durch die Wirklichkeit gegeben, war nur einzusetzen. . . . (Schenk 381)

Mann wrote of Tod in Venedig, that it must give the impression of being serious, and that it dealt with the most serious subject he had written about since Buddenbrooks (Mann, Briefwechsel 155). He considered it a tragedy, and wrote to an admirer about it: "Es geht nicht gut aus, die Würde des 'Helden und Dichters' wird gründlich zerrüttet. Es ist eine richtige Tragödie. . . " (Mann, Briefwechsel 153). Although he felt strongly that this was a good work, he feared the reaction of the general public. He explained this view in a letter to a friend during the writing of Tod in Venedig, telling him of his progress on the work. He said that it would never occur to him to present this "mit größter Delikatesse mit dem tiefsten moralischen Ernst behandelte Geschichte auf einem öffentlichen Podium" (Mann, Briefwechsel 147). His concern about this work seems to be occasioned by the fact that it was so highly personal. It is now well known that Thomas Mann had

homosexual attractions and that Tod in Venedig was inspired by such an attraction to an adolescent boy. He himself said that the writing of this novella was a cathartic process. By that, he certainly didn't mean a purge of his own homosexual feelings, for they continued and became more prominent as he grew older. Tod in Venedig had not, however, actually been planned as a novella involving homo-erotic attractions. The novella was originally to have been about the aging Goethe's love for a young girl. The importance of this original conception for the novella, and its implications for the work become apparent when investigated further.

Bernd Effe, in "Sokrates in Venedig: Thomas Mann und die platonische Liebe", writes: "Die Wendung des Themas [of Tod in Venedig] ins Päderastisch-Homo-Erotisches, ist biographisch motiviert, durch ein entsprechendes Erlebnis des Autors" (162). This experience took place during his vacation in Venice with his wife Katia in 1911, and, as Mann himself reported, most of the details of the novella are based upon this trip, including the portrayal of the Polish boy and the impression he made upon Thomas Mann. Katia Mann confirmed his foible for the boy, and the fact that he did spend much time watching him. Although she denied that he followed him all around the city, she said that he fascinated him and he thought often of him: "er gefiel ihm über die Maßen" (Effe 162). For his work on the novella, Mann acquired several works dealing with homosexual love for boys, including writings by Plutarch, Plato, and Xenophon, which Goethe used as a reference for some of his works (Effe 162).

In several of Goethe's texts, Xenophon is mentioned. Sander Gilman notes a parellelism to Xenophon's text about the senses *Memorabilia,* (mentioning homosexual love) with Goethe's poem about Cupid, printed in his "Italian Journey". The poem is to the "young and beautiful boy Cupid". Gilman suggests that it is the same boy immortalized in Goethe's "Roman Elegies". As Gilman describes these "Roman Elegies", Goethe, "blind and maddened by his beautiful young visitor . . ., can no longer trust his senses", and asks if this young visitor is not Goethe's homosexual lover (Gilman, Sexuality 227-29). This sounds very much like the dilemma of Aschenbach , and, as we see, rather like that of Thomas Mann.

Another of Mann's readings during this time took him to Plato's Eros theory. Simply, Plato argued that heterosexual love is the lowest form of love, because its aim is to combat deficit mortality of humanity by producing offspring and that only human beings have the ability to rise above that to "spiritual-intellectual" love. For Plato, that love was definitely homosexual love (Effe 155). As will be shown, Mann encouraged his readers to make these connections through the Greek imagery surrounding Tadzio and through Aschenbach's daydreams of Socrates and Phaedrus.

The autobiographical aspect of Tod in Venedig has been ignored in most traditional interpretations by taboo-conscious critics: "Ein besonders krasses Beispiel stellt die Arbeit von H.W. Nicklas dar (Thomas Mann's Novella, 'Der Tod in Venedig, Diss, Marburg, 1966), der das Absehen von der Biographie des Autors ausdrücklich zum Prinzip der Interpretation erklärt"

(Effe 154). But in today's more progressive social climate, homosexuality is more openly discussed and Thomas Mann's homosexual inclinations are not considered so shocking. With the recent publication of Mann's diaries, it is known that deep emotional experiences ("Eschütterungen") were much stronger for him with his homosexual experiences than with his heterosexual ones. It is likely that these emotions were made manifest in his writing. And, knowing that, the Venice experience with the Polish boy easily fits in (Effe 163).

The fact that this erotic experience took place in Venice is significant, as well. Venice was seen as the city of fabulous contradictions - of art and artists, of beauty and splendor, but also as a decayed and fallen city. It was seen as the city which could encourage, like no other place, joy, pleasure, change of pace and beauty (Schenk 401). Venice was a literary setting often chosen as a backdrop for fin-de-siecle decadence and decline. Christiane Schenk discusses some of the many authors who set novels in Venice: Maurice Barrès (who wrote the first Death in Venice, La Mort de Venise in 1903), Marcel Proust, Heinrich Mann, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gerhard Hauptman, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hermann Hesse, Oscar Wilde and Henry James. As in Tod in Venedig, the idea of decadence hiding behind a falsely placid exterior could be used as a literary motif. Jonas summarized Venice's paradoxical appeal: "behind a facade of greatest beauty and magnificence are hidden disease, immorality and crime" (Jonas 40).

As has been shown, both homosexuality and cholera were current

themes and cause for general concern when Mann was writing Tod in Venedig. Both were regarded by much of the medical world and the general public as serious illnesses, as pathological conditions, resulting from lack of self-control and will-power. Both were regarded with fear and disgust; their victims disgraced, ostracized and filled with shame. Public perception thus conditioned how the cholera victim and the homosexual reacted to the realization that he or she was afflicted.

For the homosexual, secrecy was the only socially appropriate response, so homosexuality remained hidden, denied and sublimated. The results of this enforced secrecy could be disastrous. It was not unusual for a man arrested for homosexuality to commit suicide, rather than face prosecution (Lauritsen and Thorstad 23). However, secrecy was deemed an inappropriate response to the knowledge of a cholera outbreak. Openness, which would lead to prevention and treatment were considered the ethically correct reaction. Where openness was rejected, controllable outbreaks of the disease turned into deadly, raging epidemics through a policy of silence. The responses to homosexuality, on a personal level, and to cholera, on a governmental (societal) level were, in many cases, similar. Both were silent and secret, rather than open and educating. The results of such responses were similarly devastating, secrecy leading ultimately to the death of the person or the city from the hidden knowledge. In other words, the destructive cycle of suppression and degeneration begins with an impossible paradox, as illustrated through both the motifs of cholera and homosexuality

in Tod in Venedig. Knowing the likely reaction of the public if news of a cholera outbreak got out, authorities felt compelled to secrecy. It was that secrecy, however, which allowed the disease to spread unchecked, until finally, it grew into an uncontrollable epidemic. The resulting chaotic scenario, of hundreds, even thousands of sick and dying cholera victims was exactly what the public had feared in the first place, while the abrupt end to the city's lucrative trade and tourism is what the city government had feared. The cholera motif reflects upon the theme of homosexuality in Tod in Venedig with this point. Aschenbach feels compelled to maintain secrecy about his homosexual attraction to the young boy, Tadzio, because of the possible public reaction. This, combined with his fear that if he confronts Tadzio, his idealization of him would be destroyed, causes him to further suppress his feelings. This suppression ultimately makes him ill. By his death, he has come to resemble the lecherous old pervert who had so repulsed him earlier. The importance of secrecy and sublimation in the novella is underscored by the continual reference to the suppression of cholera throughout the work, as well as its connections to the motif of Aschenbach's suppressed homosexual inclinations.

In Tod in Venedig, these two motifs, cholera and homosexuality, are woven into the story through direct references and through allusions to their social and historical perceptions. The significance of these references, as related to the theme of suppression and its possible consequences, can easily be discovered with a closer inspection of the text. Particularly important in

this analysis is Mann's portrayal of the following: 1) Venice as setting for the novella; 2) the continued presence of a "miasma" in Venice; 3) the unwise risks which Aschenbach takes even after he knows that cholera is present in the city; 4) his yearning for death; 5) foreshadowings of death, which his unwise behavior represents; 6) Aschenbach's image of Tadzio as a Greek god, and the homoerotic connotations of this conception of him; 7) Aschenbach's concern for his reputation; 8) the resulting secrecy and sublimation of his attraction for the boy; 9) its paralyzing effect upon his will; 10) the city government's secrecy about the cholera outbreaks and its consequences; 11) the potentially ennobling effects of openness for both Aschenbach and for the city. Keeping in mind the social and historical background discussed thus far, Mann's representation of the aforementioned aspects of cholera and homosexuality in Tod in Venedig, and the relationship of each to his theme of secrecy become apparent.

The importance of Venice as a setting for the plot was significant, in view of its reputation at the time. Aschenbach's inspiration to travel to Venice makes this clear: "Wenn man über Nacht das Unvergleichliche, das märchenhaft Abweichendes zu erreichen wünschte, wohin ging man? Aber das war klar" (Mann, Tod 469). Even as he makes his half-hearted attempt to leave, he cannot help pondering the deceptive appearance of the city, since danger and decay are hidden behind its charming facade. "Das war Venedig, die schmeichlerische und verdächtige Schöne, . . . halb Märchen, halb Fremdenfalle" (Mann, Tod 515). Venice brings out the long hidden side of

Aschenbach. He is unable to impose a controlled and structured life upon himself in Venice, as he has everywhere else. He allows himself to slip for the first time into a life of leisure and pleasure. "Nur dieser Ort verzauberte ihn, entspannte sein Wollen, machte ihn glücklich" (Mann, Tod 506).

Venice's atmosphere also plays an important role in evoking the image of a steadily sickening city. The miasma, commented on often by Aschenbach, describes the foul air, the bad-smelling water of the lagoons, the canals, the sea and the overwhelming heat and humidity which capture these smells and keep them oppressively close to the ground. As the plot progresses, the putrid smell of the heavy air and foul water and the sweet medicinal smell of disinfectant is mentioned increasingly. The presence of the miasma grows with that of the two "diseases":

> Nachmittags fuhr Aschenbach bei Windstille und schwerem Sonnenbrand nach Venedig; denn ihn trieb die Manie, den polnischen Geschwistern zu folgen, . . . [er] witterte plötzlich in der Luft ein eigentümliches Arom, von dem ihm jetzt schien, als habe es schon seit Tagen, ohne ihm ins Bewußtwein zu dringen, seinen Sinn berührt - einen süßlich-offiziellen Geruch, der an Elend und Wunden und verdächtige Reinlichkeit erinnerte. (Mann, Tod 511)

When these signs of Venice's ills are noticable, Aschenbach feels is fearful and repulsed. But when a fresh breeze blows from the sea and dissipates the heavy air, he ignores the danger it represents, and he relaxes happily.

Aschenbach takes unwise risks as his interest in Tadzio grows, sometimes following the boy through Venice's hot, dirty alleyways to the

point of exhaustion. Twice while watching Tadzio, Aschenbach buys overripe strawberries (a posible "exciting cause" of cholera, according to Reese) from vendors, the risk of infection from the unwashed fruit seeming more ominous in the oppressive miasmatic conditions: "Und dann frühstückte er große, vollreife Erdbeeren, die er von einem Händler erstand. Es war sehr warm geworden, obgleich die Sonne die Dunstschicht des Himmels nicht zu durchdringen vermochte. Trägheit fesselte den Geist" (Mann, Tod 489). By the end of the novella, already suffering from cholera-like ailments, the risk he's taking as he again buys overripe strawberries from a vendor becomes apparent :

> Sein Kopf brannte, sein Körper war mit klebrigem Schweiß bedeckt, sein Genick zitterte, ein nicht mehr erträglicher Durst peinigte ihn, er sah sich nach irgendwelcher, nach augenblicklicher Labung um. Vor einem kleinen Gemüseladen kaufte er einige Früchte, Erdbeeren, überreife und weiche Ware, und aß im Gehen davon. (Mann, Tod 533)

The apparent death-wish which this behavior seems to reflect, is confirmed in Aschenbach's daydreams. "Er liebte das Meer aus tiefen Gründen: . . . aus einem verbotenen, seiner Aufgabe gerade entgegengesetzten und ebendarum verführerischen Hange zum Ungegliederten, Maslosen, Ewigen, zum Nichts" (Mann, Tod 487). He seems in many ways to be ready for death, even to want it, and foreshadowings of his death continue through the novella. His journey is first inspired by the sight of an odd character on the steps of a mortuary chapel during a stroll through a graveyard. Immediately upon his arrival in Venice, he has an eerie experience with a sinister gondolier in a coffin-like gondola. He

ponders how much this gondola ride reminds him of the final trip in the underworld. Yet he resigns himself to accept whatever lies ahead on this journey, which continues to foreshadow death, thus symbolically accepting his own death. Just as his death is foreshadowed throughout the novella, so, too, is his future condition foreshadowed in a repulsive old man on the steamer to Venice, whom Aschenbach begins more and more to resemble as he nears his end:

> Einer, in hellgelbem, übermodisch geschnittenem Sommeranzug, roter Krawatte und kühn aufgebogenem Panama, . . . war alt, man konnte nicht zweifeln. Runzeln umgaben ihm Augen und Mund. Das matte Karmesin der Wangen war Schminke, das braune Haar unter dem farbig umsundenen Strohhut Perücke, sein Hals verfallen und sehnig, sein aufgesetztes Schnurrbärtchen und die Fliege am Kinn gefärbt. (Mann, Tod 471) Widerlich war es zu sehen, in welchen Zustand den aufgestutzen Greisen seine falsche Gemeinschaft mit der Jugend gebracht hatte. [. . .] er war kläglich betrunken. [. . .] er lallte, zwinkerte, kicherte, hob seinen beringten runzeligen Zeigefinger zu alberner Neckerei und leckte auf abscheulich zweideutige Art mit der Zungenspitzt die Mundwinkel. (Mann, Tod 473-4)

Although Aschenbach's behavior is not described as overtly repulsive, as is the old man's, the image is nonetheless conjured up for the reader. Aschenbach increasingly resembles the old man, emphasizing his transforming appearance, as he desperately attempts to hide his secret and his degenerating condition beneath a facade of youth and health:

> Aschenbach . . . sah im Glase seine Brauen sich entschiedener und ebenmäßiger wölben, den Schnitt seiner Augen sich verlängern, ihren Glanz durch eine leichte Untermalung des Lides sich heben, sah weiter unten, so die Haut bräunlich-ledern gewesen, weich aufgetragen, ein zartes Karmin erwachen, seine Lippen, blutarm soeben noch, himbeerfarben schwellen, die Furchen der Wangen, des Mundes, die Runzeln der Augen unter Creme und Jugendhauch verschwinden, ... Der Berückte ging, traumglücklich, verwirrt und furchtsam. Seine Krawatte war rot, sein breitschattender

Strohhut mit einem mehrfarbigen Bande umwunden. (Mann, Tod 531-2)

Even Tadzio's smile, a small acknowledgement of Aschenbach's attraction to him, foreshadows death: "der, [Aschenbach] welcher dies Lächeln empfangen, enteilte damit wie mit einem verhängnisvollen Geschenk" (Mann, Tod 510). Aschenbach's response to this "deadly gift" almost physically overwhelms him, as he whispers to himself what he finally realizes - that he is in love with the boy. But even here, Mann is careful to point out that this love is not without honor and dignity: "Überwaltigt und mehrfach von Schauern, überlaufen, flüsterte er die stehende Formel der Sehnsucht, - unmöglich hier, absurd, verworfen, lächerlich und heilig doch, ehrwürdig auch hier noch: 'ich liebe dich!'" (Mann, Tod 510). [7]

Earlier references in the text to Plato's writing play an important role, as Plato's, Goethe's and Xenophon's discussions of homo-erotic love are alluded to. The reader is reminded that this sort of attraction was not always considered shameful or degenerate:

> Zahlreiche Kriegshelden der Vorzeit hatten willig sein Joch getragen, denn gar keine Erniedrigung galt die der Gott verhängte, und Taten, die als Merkmale der Feigheit wären gescholten worden, wenn sie um anderer Zwecke willen geschehen wären: Fußfälle, Schwüre, inständige Bitten und sklavisches Wesen, solche geriechten dem Liebenden nicht zur Schande sondern er erntete vielmehr noch Lob dafür. (Mann, Tod 516)

Thus the Greek god imagery which surrounds Tadzio from the first in the novella takes on a new significance. Aschenbach is sensitive to Tadzio's "godlike" beauty and purity. Mann's description of the boy is saturated with imagery of beautiful, white marble statues of Greek gods. , through which he

connotes both virginal purity (in contrast with Aschenbach's browned, aged, steadily sickening body) and at the same time, the sexual images of Greek pederastic relationships:

> Like the pure, white classical statues that Winckelman and Goethe draw upon for their image of the pure sexual object, the skin of the child represents the purity (and therefore the attractiveness) of the child as sexual object. (Gilman, Sexuality 273)

The implications of this imagery is underscored by Aschenbach's view of Tadzio as a god, or as a classical Greek sculpture:

> Sein Antlitz, bleich und anmutig verschlossen, von honigfarbenem Haar umringelt, mit der gerade abfallenden Nase dem lieblichen Munde, dem Ausdruck von holdem und göttlichem Ernst, erinnerte an griechische Bildwerke aus edelster Zeit. (Mann, Tod 480). [Aschenbach] erstaunte . . . auf's neue, ja erschrak über die wahrhaft gottähnliche schönheit des Menschenkindes. (Mann, Tod 485) [Zu] sehen, wie die lebendige Gestalt, vormännlich hold und herb, mit triefenden Locken und schön wie ein zarter Gott, herkommend aus den Tiefen von Himmel und Meer, dem Elemente entstieg und entrann: dieser Anblick gab mythische Vorstellungen ein, er war wie Dichterkunde von anfänglichen Zeiten, vom Ursprung der Form und von der Geburt der Götter. (Mann, Tod 490)

As his obsession with the boy's beauty grows, so, too, does Aschenbach's concern for his own appearance. He tries outwardly to appear more pleasing to the boy, but is still desperately worried that he might appear foolish to the rest of the world. His concern for his reputation is not new. It only takes on a new dimension as he struggles to maintain his image of respectable citizen, despite his erotic feelings, which are increasingly difficult to suppress.

Literally a slave to his art, Aschenbach is preoccupied with his reputation. He struggles on the work which should be his masterpiece, driven onward by a mechanical need to produce, to live up to the reputation he has built for himself through self-discipline and hard, nerve-taxing work. He knows he is successful; he has earned a place in the canons of literature, yet finds his success a mixed blessing. It is the means to a comfortable existence, but is also a burden, creating a public image which he must live up to:

> Der Vierziger hatte, ermattet von den Strapazen und Wechselfällen der eigentlichen Arbeit, alltäglich eine Post zu bewältigen, die Wertzeichen aus aller Herren Länder trug. (Mann, Tod 462) [Er war] zu beschäftigt mit den Aufgaben, welche sein Ich und die Europäische Seele ihm stellten, so belastet von der Verpflichtung zur Produktion, der Zerstreuung zu abgeneigt, um zum Liebhaber den bunten Außenwelt zu taugen. (Mann, Tod 458-9)

As Aschenbach pushes himself to the point of exhaustion upon his new work, he is determined that his admiring readers should not know of his growing weariness. And his growing attraction to Tadzio forces him to reflect even more the importance he places upon his reputation.

> Er verweilte dort drinnen längere Zeit vor dem Spiegel und betrachtete sein graues Haar, sein müdes und scharfes Gesicht. In diesem Augenblick dachte er an seinen Ruhm und daran, daß viele ihn auf den Straßen kannten und ehrerbietig betrachteten, um seines sicher treffenden und mit Anmut gekrönten Wortes willen - rief alle äußeren Erfolge seines Talentes auf, die ihm irgend einfallen wollten, und gedachte sogar seine Nobilierung. (Mann, Tod 490-91)

He worries what his Prussian forefathers would have thought of his love for the boy. "[Er] gedachte . . . der haltungsvollen Strenge, der anständigen Männlichkeit ihres Wesens und lächelte schwermütig. Was

würden sie sagen? (Mann, Tod 515-16) Ever more concerned for his reputation, he suppresses his erotic feelings for Tadzio, just as he had always suppressed his sensuality. "Ungenügsamkeit freilich hatte schon dem Jüngling als Wesen und innerste Natur des Talentes gegolten, und um ihretwillen hatte er das Gefühl gezügelt und erkältet" (Mann, Tod 460). When Aschenbach's plan to leave the city fails and he realizes he is glad, he feels he must mask his joy at returning to the hotel. Embarrassed as he imagines the other guests' reactions to his return, he feels he must hide his true emotions: . "[Die Gondels] einziger Passagier unter der Maske ärgerlicher Resignation [verbarg] die Ängstlich-übermütige Erregung eines entlaufenen Knaben verbarg" (Mann, Tod 496). As he settles into a comfortable, leisurely life of secretly watching and following the boy, Aschenbach hides his attraction to him and agonizes over how he appears to others. The secret attraction begins to preoccupy his time. Even in his daydreams, Aschenbach worries about public reactions, if his growing obsession with Tadzio were to be discovered. Aschenbach is inspired by his feelings to write with a passion he hasn't felt in many years:

> [Er formte] seine kleine Abhandlung - jene anderthalb Seiten erlesener Prosa. . ., deren Lauterkeit, Adel und schwingende Gefühlsspannung binnen kurzem die Bewunderung vieler erregen sollte. (Mann, Tod 505)

Mann then tempers the joy with an aside, saying that it is certainly good that the world will see only Aschenbach's finished work, and not know the the circumstances which inspired the writing of it, as the consequences

could be devastating:

> Es ist sicher gut, daß die Welt nur das schöne Werk, nicht auch seine Ursprünge, nicht seine Entstehungsbedingungen kennt, denn die Kenntnis der Quellen, aus denen dem Künstler Eingebung floß, würde sie oftmals verwirren, abschrecken und so die Wirkungen des vortrefflichen aufheben. (Mann, Tod 505)

He begins disguising his true appearance, that of a greying, serious, leathery old man behind a mask of make-up, bright clothes and dyed hair. His secret obsession for the boy begins showing its darker side, that it has the power to make him look undignified and foolish, exactly what he had feared in the first place. Hiding behind his increasingly false beautified exterior, the secret he now attempts to hide is that of his deteriorating health, while his attentions toward the boy become increasingly open. The reader is reminded of the lecherous young-old man, who had repulsed Aschenbach, as he now does us.

Aschenbach's strict suppression of the sensual aspects of his character has exhausted him, paralyzing his ability to make a decision. He suffers the symptoms of Abulia, the disease so often attributed to homosexual men struggling with their secret. He increasingly feels disgust toward himself and the disciplined, if successful life he has lived thus far. He is a man with tired eyes, and a thin and furrowed face who longs to retrieve the fiery excitment which he once felt while writing. But Aschenbach's attempt to regain the sensuality he has suppressed since his youth proves overwhelming, as he begins acknowledging long-buried sensations. He had succeeded in tempering his youthful sensibilities for the sake of his talent only through an

iron resolve, and had instead directed his energies toward production of passionate and masterful intellectual works. But his will has grown tired, his middle-aged body and mind are fatigued, and the work, which has been everything to him, is no longer produced from and with joy, but out of a sense of duty:

> Rächte sich nun also die geknechtete Empfindung, indem sie ihn verließ, indem sie seine Kunst fürder zu tragen sich weigerte und alle Lust, alles Entzücken an der Form und am Ausdruck mit sich hinwegnahm? [Aber] er selbst, während die Nation [seine Meisterschaft] ehrte, er ward ihrer nicht froh, und es schien ihm, als ermangle sein Werk jener Merkmale feurig spielender Laune, die, ein Erzeugnis der Freude, mehr als irgendein innerer Gehalt, ein gewichtigerer Vorzug, die Freude der genießenden Welt bildeten. (Mann, Tod 460)

Thus, uninspired and unable to continue writing, he cannot muster the will to continue. He feels himself repulsed by his need for fastidiousness, which he no longer can satisfy. The great Prussian writer, who had forsaken the idleness and carelessness of youth ("Müßiggang" and "sorglose Fahrlässigkeit der Jugend" [Mann, Tod 462]) for a strict, structured life of self-control, can no longer find the will to work. Having always honored in his works those who overcame their weakness of will to acheive, he is afraid now to acknowledge his own inability to do just that. His dilemma becomes worse. Even though he feels threatened, he cannot enforce his will with the eerie gondolier when he first arrives in Venice. He becomes angry with himself when he can't decide whether to leave Venice or stay. And later, he can't bring himself to tell Tadzio's family about the cholera in the city. He

feels powerless over his emotions. Finally, having joyfully accepted his attraction to Tadzio, he actually feels physically repulsed at the thought of regaining his self-control: "...und der Gedanke an Heimkehr, an Besonnenheit, Nüchternheit, Mühsal und Meisterschaft widerte ihn in solchem Maße, daß sein Gesicht zum Ausdruck physischer Übelkeit verzerrte". (Mann, Tod 527)

Aschenbach suppresses not only his homosexual feelings, he is guilty also of keeping silent about his knowledge of the cholera outbreak. As the cholera's presence in Venice grows, Aschenbach notices more and more the smells of the city and decreasing numbers of Germans in his hotel, as the newpapers of the German-speaking countries report rumors, replete with statistics, and official denials, of an outbreak of cholera in Venice. But suddenly the hotel stops supplying these newspapers. Aschenbach hears talk of the "Übel" (evil, pestilence, disease) in the city, but the subject is quickly changed when he asks for more information. An effort to inform the populace is made by the town elders through posters advising them to be cautious. But this, too, is deceptive as the posters only suggest avoidance of canal water and certain sea foods, due to a gastric ailment which might cause problems in this sort of weather. The illness is not named, and not the slightest indication is given by the government that it might be the deadly epidemic disease, cholera.

Trying to confirm his suspicions that the cholera has manifested itself in Venice, Aschenbach finds almost a delight in posing leading questions and

forcing those who possess knowledge of the plague to lie about it. Again and again Aschenbach receives the same defensive reply, that the police, merely as a precaution in this weather, have ordered certain sanitation measures to be taken:

> Ein Übel? Aber was für ein Übel? Ist der Scirocco ein Übel? Sie belieben zu scherzen! Ein Übel! Warum nicht gar! Eine vorbeugende Maßregel, verstehen Sie doch! Eine polizeiliche Anordnung Gegen die Wirkungen der drückenden Wirkungen der Witterung. . . . (Mann, Tod 521)

Finding nothing in the local newspapers and with no access anymore to international ones, he finally comes to his own conclusion: "Man soll schweigen!" He begins to derive a certain thrill from his realization that there is another secret besides his own being covered up - - and he knows about it.

Aschenbach broods over whether or not to tell Tadzio and his family about the secret. Like the city government, he resolves to stay silent, but unlike their motivation, greed for money, his silence is selfishly motivated by his obsession with the boy. He cannot bear the thought of being alone in Venice without Tadzio.

Finally he learns the truth about the disease from an Englishman - an outsider. He learns that the city has been hiding a number of cholera deaths from the tourists and that city officials have lied to the outside world about the disease. This has resulted in inner turmoil in the government. The city's first medical officer, who had been too scrupulous to tolerate the harmful

silence had resigned, to be replaced by a more compliant one. This deception had only had the effect of demoralizing the rest of Venice's population. Crime, drunkenness and even murder had since increased. The silence of the city officials, despite all of it's negative backlashes, is motivated by the fear of harming the city's reputation. Should the rest of the world learn of the epidemic, Venice would be blockaded, and precious tourist and trade income would be lost:

> Aber die Furcht vor allgemeiner Schädigung, die Rücksicht auf die kürzlich eröffnete Gemäldeausstellung in den öffentlichen Gärten, auf die gewaltigen Ausfälle, von denen im Falle die Panik und des Verrufes die Hotels, die Geschäfte, das ganze vielfältige Fremdengewerbe bedroht waren, zeigten sich mächtiger in der Stadt als Wahrheitsliebe und Achtung vor internationalen Abmachungen; sie vermochte die Behörde, ihre Politik des Beschweigens und des Ableugnens hartnäckig aufrechtzuerhalten. (Mann, Tod 526)

The city government does not have to hide the knowledge of a cholera outbreak this way. Open, honest reaction to the outbreak would be more likely to lead to a "cure" than the dishonest policies it pursues. Aschenbach also ignores his chances to "set things right" with openness and honesty. After his first and only frenzied rush of literary production inspired by what he sees as the perfect beauty and form of the boy, he wants to approach him and talk with him. This step, openly talking with the boy, would have made his interest a public matter. It is the fear of the repercussions from public recognition of his feelings that deters him. At the thought of taking this step and breaking the delicious hold his secret has over him, he feels physically ill. First and foremost on his mind, when he gives up the idea, is ascertaining

whether he has been noticed by anyone, including the boy, and just as importantly, in preserving his precious secret. Herein lies the answer to the question on the reader's mind, which Bernd Effe expresses so eloquently: "Doch warum die Wende vom Affirmativ-Hymnischen ins Negativ-Problematische [in the depiction of Aschenbach's attraction to Tadzio]? (Effe 164). The necessary sublimation of "unacceptable" sensations makes them seem dirty and they become destructive. They make Aschenbach become the way others see him - as diseased. Not making his secret a public, open issue, making it a lighter, less intense issue for himself, he buries it still more, making it more secret, more hidden and more shameful. His blissful, beautiful secret becomes illicit, demeaning and literally sickening: "Dieser Schritt, den zu tun er versäumte, er hätte sehr möglicherweise zum Guten, Leichten und Frohen, zu heiliger Ernüchterung geführt" (Mann, Tod 505). His fear of being ridiculed makes him all the more ridiculous: "Er war verwirrt, er fürchtete, daß irgend jemand . . . seinen Lauf, seine Niederlage beobachtet haben möchte, fürchtete sehr die Lächerlichkeit" (Mann, Tod 506). Now, Aschenbach's decline truly begins:

> Zucht und Zügellosigkeit, Disziplin und Leidenschaft, Apollonisches und Dionysisches: das eine hat Aschenbach's Leben bestimmt, das andere überflutet ihn jetzt und reißt ihn in den Abgrund. Der einmalige Höhepunkt platonisch-erotischer Sublimierung mit seiner prekären Indienstnahme der Sinnlichkeit durch den Geist ist nicht festzuhalten; das Sinnliche gewinnt Dominanz. (Effe 160)

Once Aschenbach learns the truth about the cholera, excited yet full of horror at the secret he possesses, he considers what to do with his new-found

knowledge. Again, he has a chance to act nobly, this time by divulging his knowledge of the cholera to Tadzio and his family and urging their timely flight from the city. But this knowledge, lethal when it is kept secret, is kept to himself. His resolve to remain silent and his denial of danger contribute to his demise. But before his death, his own silence about the presence of the disease in the city and the suppression of his love for Tadzio, much like the government's deceptions in suppressing the reality about the cholera, become too much for his guilty conscience. He has a terrifying, wildly erotic dream filled with images of disease and danger, from which he awakes completely shaken. He knows he is acting unwisely. But the secrets he has suppressed have taken control of the last shreds of his will-power and his dignity, and he can no longer keep them hidden. He, who possessed this secret knowledge for so long, becomes possessed by it.

Finally, shortly before Aschenbach's death, the symptoms of the disease, cholera, and the "illness", homosexuality, become so intertwined as to be inseperable and indistinguishable from each other; Aschenbach's death seems to have come as much from his inner turmoil from the suppression of his secrets, as from the cholera itself:

> [Dieses] schlimme Geheimnis der Stadt [verschmolz] mit seinem eigensten Geheimnis. . . (Mann, Tod 512-13) Aber zugleich wandte er beständig eine spürende und eigensinnige Aufmerksamkeit den unsauberen Vorgängen im Innern Venedigs zu, jenem Abenteuer der Außenwelt, das mit dem seines Herzens dunkel zusammenfloß. . . . (Mann, Tod 516) Er hatte mit gewissen, nur halb körperlichen Schwindelanfällen zu kämpfen, die von einer heftig aufsteigenden Angst begleitet waren, einem Gefühl der Ausweg und Aussichtslosigkeit, von dem nicht klar wurde, ob es sich auf die

Äußere Welt oder auf seine eigene Existenz bezog. (Mann, Tod 535)

Thus, in the end, Aschenbach and Venice are both victims of their hidden secrets.

The fact that Mann uses the cholera theme to illustrate aspects of the suppression of knowledge shows that this suppression is negative. Nothing good comes from hiding the presence of the disease. Although the city's actions stem from instincts of self-preservation, it is ultimately those very actions that lead to the city's disaster. The same irreconcilable alternatives faced homosexuals: Risk public reaction at revealing the truth, or risk self-destruction at sublimating it. This is the dilemma which faced Thomas Mann. As Gerhard Härle, in Männerweiblichkeit: zur Homosexualität bei Klaus und Thomas Mann, wrote of Mann's diaries:

> Die Tagebücher sind die Dokumente der Produktionspsychologie eines Homosexuellens, der notwendig des Doppellebens bedarf, um er selber, um in der Verdoppelung wahr zu sein. Im Gewand des Alltäglichen und Anekdotischen überliefern sie das Geheimnis ihrer eigenen Notwendigkeit sowie der des literarischen Schaffens. (Härle 211)

The writing of Tod in Vededig can be seen as a sort of "coming out," a cathartic process, which allowed Mann to focus his energy upon creative production rather than in sublimating his homosexual attraction and allowing it to destroy him, as it does his tragic hero, Aschenbach. The struggle with the question of risking openness or living secretively is still relevant. This is the the terrible predicament in which AIDS victims find themselves today. The reflection of the present in this literary work of almost a century ago gives Mann's work a new and meaningful significance.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

[1] Cholera is still a concern in developing countries, and is even used as a potent weapon, in an altogether different sense today: The "Süddeutsche Zeitung" of Weds., July 25, 1990 reported that a team of doctors had confirmed that a bomb dropped by the Sri Lankan government on Tamil rebel fighters was filled with cholera germs. The Sri Lankan government denies it.

[2] "Contagion" is defined in Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 21st ed., 1966 as "transmission of an infectious disease by contact, either immediate or medicate, with the sick; one one the modes of infection."

[3] "Eugenics" is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary, 1976, as " the study of heriditary improvement, especially of human improvement by genetic control."

[4] "Abulia" is defined as "loss of will-power" by Webster's, "krankhafte Unentschlossenheit" by the Duden, and "an extreme loss of initiative and will power" by Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry (Smith 104).

[5] Cholera and homosexuality were added to the list of faults of the Jews, reaffirming many people's anti-semitic sentiments. The importation of cholera into Hamburg in 1892 was blamed by various experts upon poor Jews

emigrating from Russia, who stayed in the filthy, overcrowded boarding houses in Hamburg on their journey to a new homeland (Evans 282-83). The image of the biologically degenerate, "feminized" (castrated) Jew was associated closely with that of the homosexual during the fin-de-siecle as well (Gilman 267).

6 Interestingly, one of the best-known homosexual rights fighters, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, fled southward in his middle-aged years, tired after many years of fighting for homosexual rights. In the mid-1880s, he settled in Aguila, Italy, where he died in poverty and exile. This, says James Steakley, author of The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, adds "a special resonance" to Mann's Tod in Venedig (22).

7 This brings to mind the words of Krafft-Ebing, as he reneged his stance that homosexuality was a disease. He wrote that all "noble activities of the heart" associated with heterosexual love as well as the defects thereof, "can be equally associated with homosexual love" (Robinson viii).

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