

The Interweavement and Conflict of Rationality and Sensation—The Travel of Fate in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*

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Abstract

The novella *Death in Venice* narrates the story of the writer von Aschenbach. He writes diligently for years without slackening his efforts. Just as his ascetic lifestyle is taking a toll on him, a chance encounter with a traveller suddenly inspires him anew. His encounter with a handsome young Pole, Tadzio, in Venice, brings his passion for life and his pursuit for perfect art to a condition of ecstasy. As a result, he totally ignores the prevalence of cholera, which consequently results in his illness and ruin. The vacancy of his emotional world coupled with his high position as an aristocrat forms an internal conflict within him that cannot be resolved. The description of Venice city life reflects his personality: despite the romantic scene in Venice, cholera is widespread in the streets. In Mann’s work, he expresses his appreciation of the spirit of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which was written by Friedrich Nietzsche. He also indirectly rejects Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy of arts that represses life will. However, Mann favors the latter in his life, saying that praise of drives in life should be merely considered a “temporary correction.” The research will analyse and probe into the motivation, narrative structure, and characterization of the writing. It will explain the internal conflict artists often experience, as well as the aesthetics of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer implied in the novel. It will also dig into possible relations between the author and the protagonist in terms of background and characteristics.

Key Words: European literature, view of art, modernism, philosophy in literature, aestheticism