

The Representation of Instinctive Homosexuality and Immoral Narcissism in Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902) and Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912)

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Volume 19 Issue 2 (June 2017) Article 6**Louise Willis,****"The Representation of Instinctive Homosexuality and Immoral Narcissism in Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902) and Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912)"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss2/6>>

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Abstract: In her article "The Representation of Instinctive Homosexuality and Immoral Narcissism in Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902) and Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912)" Louise Willis examines two early literary representations of homosexuality in André Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902) and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912). She reads them with fin-de-siècle sexological theory, mainly Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Willis argues that the texts reflect the reconception of homosexuality as a latent instinct with pathological expression, rather than a sinful act of free will. The article explains that visual imagery conveys homoerotic desire, by incorporating Nietzsche's concept of Apollonian-Dionysiac duality, and through the protagonists' scopophilic regard for youth and health. Moreover, it describes how the erotics and ethics of same-sex intimacy are reconfigured in terms of creative energy, and in Mann's text, with aspects of Classical culture. Willis concludes that both authors carefully, and uniquely, distinguish between homoerotic drive and the moral sensibilities that put sexual self-expression in conflict with narcissistic excess.

Louise WILLIS

The Representation of Instinctive Homosexuality and Immoral Narcissism in Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902) and Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912)

The modernist era produced pioneering theories on sexuality from sexologists Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and John Addington Symonds, culminating with Sigmund Freud's seminal text *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). These theories revolutionized society's perception of sexuality but most significantly they lead to so-called 'perversions', including homosexuality, being newly conceived as pathological rather than immoral (Schaffner and Weller, *Modernist Eroticisms* 1). Similarly, modernist literature was preoccupied with examining the psychopathology of everyday life, the intellectualization of emotions, and the articulation of the mind's thought processes, using penetrating stylistic features such as interior monologue, stream of consciousness, focalization, and juxtaposition, thus the intimate nature of sexuality provided the perfect medium for the modernist writer to depict the individual's psyche (Bradbury and McFarlane, *Modernism* 48).

This article examines the representation of homosexuality in the modernist texts, *The Immoralist* (1902), by the French writer André Gide, which was one of the first modern texts to deal with homosexuality, and *Death in Venice* (1912) by the German author Thomas Mann. Both texts focus on the homoerotic awakening and subsequent decline of their distinguished protagonists. It is now widely accepted that both authors had homosexual inclinations and seemingly identified with the issues associated with homosexuality at the turn of the century. However the article will disregard any autobiographical elements and will focus on the textual and contextual evidence, in particular, the idea of immorality and the relationship between form and content. Anna Katharina Schaffner's *Modernism and Perversion: Sexual Deviance in Sexology and Literature, 1850-1930* (2012) will inform the analysis, along with ideas advanced by Martha Vicinus and Margaret Morganroth Gullette.

In *The Will to Knowledge: the History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1976) French theorist Michel Foucault contends that the concept of homosexuality did not exist before the nineteenth-century. He claims that the new sexual theories of the fin-de-siècle facilitated the construction of homosexual identity, transposing it from being 'a temporary aberration' to a recognized condition in which homosexuals were perceived as a new 'species' (43). This emergent classification permitted modernist writers such as Gide and Mann to explore the subject; its sensitive nature is assuaged by modernist contemplations and literary techniques. Significantly, Freud's pivotal text was published in 1905, after *The Immoralist* yet before *Death in Venice*; its direct influence on Mann's text has been acknowledged, although it's possible that Freud's predecessors may have influenced Gide. As Schaffner argues in *Modernism and Perversion*, the new perception of sexuality and perversions as instinctive, removed 'the burden of voluntary agency' from the individual, thus deviants were deemed to have 'a pathological medical condition for which [they] cannot be held fully responsible': crucially, they were no longer considered to be sinners but had become patients (2, 5).

This new conception of homosexuality as involuntary is apparent in the two early modernist novels *The Immoralist* and *Death in Venice*, in which it is shown to be a latent and potent instinctive force that has been repressed, yet cannot be stifled. Both texts depict their protagonists' homoerotic awakening as an unfolding psychological journey. In *The Immoralist*, Michel states that his marriage was a life commitment made before he had 'explored the possibilities of what [his] life could be', and he becomes increasingly aware of something 'growing inside' him (Gide 16, 72). In *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach is roused by 'an extraordinary expansion of his inner self' and before arriving in Venice he is 'haunted by an inner impulse that still had no clear direction' (Mann 199, 209). Michel channels his youthful vigor into academic work, and like Aschenbach, it is this pause from work, discipline and societal constraints that permits the latent aspect of his mind and body to find expression. Again like Aschenbach, it is the journey to the 'charming south' that 'aroused parts' within Michel that had previously 'lain dormant' (Mann 202; Gide 19).

As some critics have observed, in *Death in Venice* Mann explores Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of Apollonian-Dionysiac duality as defined in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), relating it to the emergence of Aschenbach's latent homoerotic instinct. Nietzsche argues that the two 'art-sponsoring deities' of Apollo and Dionysus exist alongside one another in powerful antagonism (*Birth* 19). The Apollonian traditionally represents order, logic, clarity, individuation, separation and sculpture, and is exemplified by the realm of dream. In contrast the Dionysian represents music, mysticism, ecstasy, fusion with nature and community, dissolution of boundaries, and it is signified by intoxication. If the Apollonian dominates then passion is lacking, and when the Dionysian governs it results in a lack of order and

structure: equalization is perfect. Gustav Aschenbach is a man whose character and lifestyle represent the Apollonian order; his burgeoning homoerotic desire is conveyed as Dionysian retribution; the narrative follows his inner conflict, his eventual submission to Dionysus and the consequent abandonment of the Apollonian.

Similarly, Nietzsche's concept represents an inherent part of Michel's transformation in *The Immoralist*. Like Aschenbach, Michel is a respectable, publicly acclaimed figure that has neglected his carnal needs in order to pursue the Apollonian course of intellectual development. His growing homoerotic desire and attraction to nature and vice suggests that his Dionysian side is advancing and taking control. Moreover, the use of Nietzsche's concept supports Schaffner's claim that homosexuals were no longer burdened with the responsibility of voluntary agency, in other words, the texts suggest that both Aschenbach and Michel are unable to prevent their Dionysian instinct from emerging, and therefore, are not responsible for its appearance. This Apollonian-Dionysiac duality is a recurrent motif in both texts and its components will be cited throughout this article.

The Immoralist recounts the details of Michel's married life, hinting at his homoerotic inclinations but, more specifically, detailing his fascination with pubescent boys. Similarly in *Death in Venice*, young Tadzio represents the singular erotic figure with which Aschenbach becomes fixated, thus both texts portray the double, inextricable transgressions of homosexual and pederastic desire and may, in fact, be more specifically defined as tales of pederastic awakening. However, these highly sensitive topics are explored subtly; the desires are neither explicitly described nor acted on, instead they function as a narrative subtext, disclosed through imagery and Dionysian symbolism, through the representation of the boys and their effect on the protagonists, and by the seemingly innocuous act of voyeurism.

The scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette suggests that a protagonist may circumvent his aging and possess youth vicariously through a pedophilic desire for the child's body ("The Exile" 215). In *Death in Venice* Aschenbach's fascination with, and longing for, young Tadzio, is simultaneously presented as a veneration of youth and beauty and a disparagement of senescence; the preoccupation obscures the implicit pederastic desire that lies beneath. Notably, Aschenbach's Apollonian upbringing did not offer the youthful blitheness that he admires in Tadzio, he had "never known youth's idleness, its carefree negligent ways," nor had he enjoyed the conventional male-male camaraderie that he observes between Tadzio and Jasiu. Moreover, Aschenbach apparently becomes so 'entranced' by Tadzio, the "sweet youthful creature" that he feels "shame" and "disgust at his own ageing body." His subjective impression of the old fop on the boat indicates the extent to which he finds the aging body repugnant. He reacts with "horror" and "a spasm of distaste" on noticing the man's "wrinkles" and "flaccid and scrawny" neck, and is astonished that his young companions "seemed to be tolerating his presence" as their equal. Moreover, this repellent Dionysian image foreshadows Aschenbach's final transformation into the ludicrous made-up figure that is desperate to impress his "lover" with the "aura of youth" (Mann 203, 210-11, 214, 261).

Just as Tadzio's pure and youthful beauty enralls the aging Aschenbach so the Arab boys embody health and vitality to Gide's ailing Michel. When Michel first arrives at Biskra "more dead than alive" it is not, as he claims, merely Marceline's "passionate care" that "saved" him, it is an encounter with the young boy Bachir that galvanizes him to "love life." As Michel discloses: "I fell in love with - his health". Michel recalls his impression of the boy's tongue as "pink like a cat's"; he has "pure white teeth" and ostensibly his "small body was in beautiful health." He describes Bachir's oozing yet "beautiful, glistening blood," which contrasts with his own ejected "black, sticky and horrible" clot and this carnal image of untainted vitality rouses in him "a wish" to live, a "wild, desperate drive towards existence," thus Michel feels connected to his body for the first time, becoming aware of its physical and sensual needs (Gide, *Immoralist* 23-4, 26-7).

Martha Vicinus claims that during the fin-de-siècle the adolescent boy emerged from the literary shadows and became a powerful cultural and sexual image, a "liminal creature" that personified "a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence"; a "vessel" into which 'anxieties, fantasies, and sexual desires' could be poured ("The Adolescent Boy" 91). This archetype is apparent in *The Immoralist*, for example, with Dionysian allusions, Michel describes the image of Lassif, a handsome young goat herder playing the flute whilst "sitting, virtually naked, on the trunk of a fallen palm tree." Michel reclines in the orchard; with closed eyes he is lulled into a sense of peacefulness and timelessness. The boy's sensual body, his seductive melody, the "gentle trickling" of water, the hot sun and tranquil breeze through the palms, all suggest a sensual and spiritual experience with extraordinarily liberating sensations. Furthermore, Michel's willingness to ignore young Mektir's theft of the scissors, illustrates the extent to which he covets the boys' unfettered existence and moral freedom. Michel is excited by Mektir's transgression and he colludes with it, thus creating in his own mind,

a sense of covert intimacy with the boy and an affinity with his amoral code. On encountering Moktir after his incarceration, Michel perceives that his "strength and beauty are simply perfect" and he invites the boy to Touggourt purely because the boy can facilitate Michel's own transgression and will know exactly "where to take [him]." Moktir is the perfect agent: the embodiment of exotic beauty and freedom, and endorser and facilitator of Michel's depravity and liberation (Gide 36, 38, 119, 121).

Likewise in *Death in Venice*, young Tadzio represents an innocent and dangerously alluring "liminal creature" through which Aschenbach transcends his banal existence. With Dionysian allusions, the narrator describes Aschenbach reclining "with closed eyes" on the beach in the warmth of the sun. He hears the "sweetness" and "wildness" of Tadzio's name as it is called in a high-pitched Bacchanalian "rallying-cry" that resonates as "music deep within him." Tadzio appears "with dripping locks and beautiful as a young god, approaching out of the depths of the sky and sea, rising and escaping from the elements." Similarly, during Tadzio's first appearance he stands on the threshold of the dining hall as his "strangely twilight-grey eyes" meet Aschenbach's; the situation is replicated in the final scene when the eyes of this "soul-summoner" beckon him on the liminal threshold of sea and sky, on his passage from life to death (Mann 221, 226-7).

In both texts the protagonists' desire is communicated indirectly to the reader, through their subjective sexual gaze. Michel is portrayed as a "watcher"; he observes Marceline in her banal tasks, declaring: "I watch: I see the sun, I see the shade [...] simply existing is enough for me." But more significantly, he also watches boys, and in contrast to the prosaic representation of the only female in the text, the spectacle of the boys clearly awakens his mind and senses. The first person narration discloses Michel's unconscious homoerotic gaze, which the particulars of his account do not openly state. When Michel first meets Bachir the reader is alerted by the fact that he reacts to Bachir's gaze with uneasiness and irritation and is embarrassed by his presence. Michel's description focuses on the boy's physical appearance and movement, noting his dexterity, his bare arms and feet, his "charming ankles and wrists" and comparing him to a "graceful animal," which is notably a feminine characteristic first discerned in his wife. Michel's account then recalls a more seductive impression. He notices that Bachir is "completely naked" under his gandourah, and highly suggestively, when it slips to "reveal his dainty little shoulder" Michel seems to find it very alluring and "really want[s] to touch" it. Evidently Michel's watching is no longer associated with observing and "simply existing": it is a visual stimulus that rouses him to life (Gide, *Immoralist* 24-5).

Gide's portrayal of Michel as a spectator alludes to Freud's discussion of voyeurism in the *Three Essays*, published three years later. Michel enjoys looking at boys and is a consumer of the homoerotic image, however, the boys in question are aware of his presence and his observation of them. In contrast, Mann's post-Freudian depiction of the voyeur portrays Aschenbach as a spectator, yet also as a spy. Seemingly unknown to Tadzio, he covertly watches the boy at every opportunity: in the dining hall, from his window and while on the beach. He devotes hours to the secret "contemplation and study" of his form, and Tadzio's "freely displayed body" becomes a "delight [to] his senses" (Mann, *Death* 235-36). The reader is therefore left in no doubt that Aschenbach is enchanted by the boy's physical beauty.

The subjective view of the boys as sensual or stimulating images is key to communicating their role as sexual objects and to expressing the pederastic desire that is never explicit or confirmed. However, despite the parallels, the texts differ greatly in their stylistic images. In *The Immoralist* Gide associates the boys with Dionysian nature and fecundity, and also liberty: they are ostensibly innocent and pure, yet to Michel they are also sensually dark and inviting. In contrast, Mann's Apollonian image of Tadzio is formal and clinical; his pure, divine and radiant sculptured beauty is not sensual but astonishing and compelling. Both authors create images that are modest and refined, and in this sense garner the reader's respect, which is crucial given the perilous subject matter.

Although the subject of homosexual and pederastic desire was transgressive and distasteful at the turn of the twentieth-century, and indeed pederasty remains so, it is valorized by both authors who challenge its 'sick' classification by associating it with invigorating creative energy and spiritual renaissance. For instance, in *The Immoralist* Michel is captivated by the physical vitality of the Arab boys and is inspired to nurture his own body, pursuing "voluptuous enjoyment" and "everything that seemed [...] divine" – the details of which he does not specify. His physical and spiritual rebirth is enticed by the image of the peasants' "beautiful, bronzed, sun-ripened skin showing through their open jackets". This rebirth, or "cure" as he calls it, occurs within a Dionysian primitive oasis through naked sunbathing and swimming rendering his body "harmonious, sensuous, almost beautiful," just like the boys that stir him. The revitalization is accompanied by a creative resurgence, which he recalls as "a desire to work re-emerging from the very inactivity that had enabled me to re-establish my health." Michel attributes both aspects of his regeneration to restful inactivity and again chooses either not to

consciously acknowledge, or not to openly identify, its true source: the spectacle of the beautiful young boys. His creativity also originates from his interest in the boys' freedom, the primitive culture of the Goths, and his fascination with young King Athalaric whose cultural rejection and "impulse towards a more savage and unsullied state" foreshadow his own (Gide 46, 53-4, 67).

Similarly, at the beginning of *Death in Venice* Gustav von Aschenbach is "increasingly subject to fatigue," whilst his work "lacked that element of sparkling and joyful improvisation." But once he encounters Tadzio, Aschenbach becomes "intellectually stimulated," observing the boy on the beach each day fills him with a new found "contentment and zest for life" (Mann 197, 201, 221, 235). Like Michel, the passion Tadzio inspires in Aschenbach brings him self-knowledge and awareness and incites a creative revitalization. Aschenbach's desire to write emerges from the "most secret voluptuousness" of his heart; its "vibrant controlled passion" enriches his artistic excellence, allowing him to create the most "exquisite prose" (Mann 239).

Despite the evident parallels between the two texts, there are also some clear distinctions. As mentioned, *Death in Venice* was written after the publication of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and Freud's influence is most apparent in Mann's contemplation of the artistic sublime. Freud argued that there was a direct connection between sexual desire, art, and culture. He believed that all (public) art and culture is derived from (private) sublimated or redirected sexual energy, which is converted in order to become more socially acceptable. In *Death in Venice*, sublimated pederastic desire drives Aschenbach to create the perfect piece of prose, notably, at the point when his Apollonian-Dionysian forces reach equipoise. Mann explores the unstable relationship between art and desire, but as Ritchie Robertson asks, "does art sublimate desire or release it?" ("Classicism" 97). In *Death in Venice* it appears to do both: "is form not two-faced?" asks the narrator, both "moral and immoral" (Mann 207). Tadzio functions as an object of admiration yet conversely, he is the source of artistic inspiration; problems arise when Aschenbach fails to contain deviant desire within the safe locus of sublimation. Aschenbach does not simply allow art to covertly express his desire; he pursues its incarnation and attempts to capture it. And, alluding to deviant sexual activity, his writing therefore becomes an "act of intercourse" between "a mind and a body," which reproaches his conscience as if following a "debauch" (Mann 240). Aschenbach's prose is an external, public manifestation of his inner corruption, and Mann uses it to destabilize the boundary of the public and private. Moreover, Tadzio's position as creative muse replaces what is customarily a female role, just as Michel's desires in *The Immoralist* subvert Marceline's traditional role as wife and mother. The representation of boys in both texts challenges the accustomed view of gender representations, an important modernist concern.

In *Death in Venice*, Tadzio is presented as a "Greek sculpture of the noblest period," a veneration of the male form; the "purest formal perfection" that provides the contemplator with visual pleasure (Robertson, "Classicism" 96; Mann 219). Aschenbach appropriates the Classical Greek models of pedagogy and pederasty in order to legitimize his passion and ascribe it some value and status. Also, as James Wilper suggests in *Reconsidering the Emergence of the Gay Novel in English and German* (2016), this Classical association allows Aschenbach to depersonalize his desire (59). Although generally taboo in the West, the ancient Greeks venerated the pederastic relationship, however, European men were traditionally offered the prospect of a clandestine pederastic encounter on the Grand Tour or when visiting the Orient. Wilper notes that Italy, especially Venice, had become a popular destination for men with homosexual inclinations, and consequently, the motifs of travel and exile often feature in texts exploring the theme of same-sex desire (*Emergence* 31, 36). Nevertheless, such liaisons were considered to be illicit and notably Tadzio is different to the boys likely to be encountered by such travellers, while Freud's text refers to the ancient Greeks' attraction to boys and suggests that it is due to their "feminine mental qualities" and need for "instruction" (*Three Essays* 22). Addington Symonds discusses "paiderastia" in his text *Sexual Inversion* (1897), remarking on its "spiritual value" to the Greeks and how, uniquely, they permitted it "free scope for development" within "a refined and intellectual civilization" (Ellis and Symonds 165-6). Mann's novella invokes these observations through Aschenbach's thoughts, and in this sense an association with art, culture and civilization elevates homosexuality and pederasty. Aschenbach recalls Socrates and Phaedrus' reciprocal relationship, with "one elderly and one young, one ugly and one beautiful, the wise beside the desirable"; the parallel allows Aschenbach to self-justify his forbidden desire under the guise of intellectualism, instruction, and spiritual aestheticism (Mann 238).

Despite its partial valorization in *Death in Venice*, pederastic desire is ultimately allied with dissolution and results in Aschenbach's death. His decline is indicated by corresponding Dionysian images; his "desire to travel" is echoed by the exotic vision of a Dionysian landscape that is, forebodingly, "moist and lush and monstrous" and the "glinting eyes of a crouching tiger" symbolize the stirring of his carnal impulse. Aschenbach's fateful decision to remain in Venice is indicated by the Dionysian

vision of "the god with the burning cheeks soar[ing] naked" and driven by the "outstorming east wind," thus invoking the unruly, intoxicated figure of Aschenbach who is stimulated by the Venetian sirocco that denotes Tadzio's Eastern origin. His twisted view of Tadzio, as a deity or "graven image" rather than art, inspires his "rising ecstasy" (Mann 199-200, 237-8). The narrator expresses Aschenbach's distorted Dionysian adulation of the boy: "The Love-god, in order to make spiritual things visible, loves to use the shapes and colours of young men, ... adorning them with all the reflected splendor of Beauty, so that the sight of them truly sets us on fire with pain and hope" (Mann, 238).

In short, Aschenbach replaces disciplined work with obsession, voyeurism and "ceaseless pursuit" whilst his former Apollonian logic, clarity and control has been discarded; this "complete drunken ecstasy" is fired by the pain and hope that Tadzio rouses and which takes him to "the point of degeneracy" (Mann 238, 248-9).

Both authors place sexuality at the center of their protagonists' existence and suggest that the vital force of sexual desire can wholly influence the individual's character and behavior. Aschenbach's dissolution indicates that, in Freudian terms, the pleasure-driven id has relinquished the stabilizing influence of the ego and the moral compass of the superego. This unimpeded, naked id can destroy the individual and pose a threat to others and to civilized society. Freud claimed that perversions were problematic if the mental forces including shame and morality were rejected and fixation dislodged normality. The Dionysian visions signify that this is Aschenbach's fate. His terrible dream of primitive Bacchanalian chaos, in which the figurative id is unleashed, symbolizes his anarchic carnal depravity; notably the image is now within Aschenbach's psyche rather than a narrative vision. His soul savors this "lascivious delirium of annihilation." He emerges "powerlessly enslaved to the daemon-god" with no capacity to fear or care, thus also invoking Nietzsche's notion that the Apollonian is "but a thin veil hiding ... the whole Dionysiac realm" (Mann, *Death* 261; Nietzsche, *Birth* 28).

Similarly, Michel's progressive conversion towards the Dionysian realm indicates that the pleasure-seeking id is now dictating his actions, and the laws of the ego and superego no longer mediate it. In Mann's text, pederastic desire is partly celebrated but is also the source of Aschenbach's dissolution and death, while in *The Immoralist* it becomes the primary aspect of Michel's deviancy and is clearly associated with notions of vice and other criminal and aberrant sexual behaviors. The maverick character of Ménélaque plays a crucial part in Michel's decline due to his uncovering and subsequent encouragement of Michel's aberrant instincts. Michel admits that Ménélaque "stripped bare" the very thoughts that he "had buried under layers of disguise," disarming his defenses and forcing him to confront the very "things [he] would rather have drawn a veil over," thus invoking Nietzsche's notion of the thin Apollonian veil. Yet Michel elects to embrace Ménélaque's philosophy, and in doing so he also chooses to emotionally abandon Marceline and her moral code. The "great zeal" Michel derives from helping Alcide poach from his own farm suggests that his moral compass is wholly amiss; he develops a "wicked curiosity" for the transgressions of others, particularly relishing the details of the Huertevents' depravity, which includes promiscuity, incest, and rape. He spends his time spying and pursuing, desperate to discover the dirty secrets of those who appear to be amoral and akin to his new self; significantly, those who are "guided entirely by [their] instincts" (Gide 85-6, 95, 97, 91).

Like Aschenbach, Michel rejects his Apollonian life of discipline and work and becomes a dissolute, Dionysian figure that is "drunk on the night, the wilderness, the anarchy." Moreover, his self-conscious account is sometimes suggestively lacking in detail, for instance, Michel confesses "I wandered aimlessly" and "I touched things with my hand, I went prowling"; the unspoken details are left to the reader's imagination (Gide, *Immoralist* 98, 114). Inevitably Michel's "dissolute thoughts" take him back to North Africa where his "stubborn attachment to evil" and the revered "dark god" lead him to sleep amongst the crawling vermin and to submit to his desires (Gide 111, 119). Michel's account ends with his unfettered yet empty, depraved life, filled only with sexual companionship. Some critics such as Albert Guérard claim that Michel's freedom is incomplete because he does not satisfy his pederastic inclinations, but this is not clearly the case (*Immoralist* 126). Given Michel's increasingly brazen and reckless behavior, further implied by his spontaneous flirtation and kissing of the coachman that he apparently "couldn't resist," it was perhaps a matter of time before he indulged himself further (Gide 115). It is also significant that a boy is implicated in Michel's other covert sexual encounter, and in the end a boy's company has become preferable to a girl's. In fact it is the strongest suggestion yet that Michel has surrendered to a boy. Despite Guérard's assertion, the final scene does not suggest that Michel failed to indulge his pederastic fantasies; it merely does not confirm that he did, which is understandable given the sexual climate at the time of publication.

The question of immorality is a key consideration when examining the representation of homosexuality at the turn of the century, particularly given that it was illegal in many countries, and that Gide's text was published just seven years after Oscar Wilde's incarceration for homosexual activity

(Schaffner, *Perversion* 14). Both texts support Schaffner's argument that deviants were relieved of "the burden of voluntary agency" and were no longer held fully responsible for their homosexuality due to its perceived involuntary, pathological nature. Michel and Aschenbach both exhibit perversions yet neither of them is denigrated purely on the basis of their sexual predilection. However, it is significant that they are not freed from all personal responsibility, but are held accountable for the moral consequences that ensue: they may not be sexual sinners, but they are undeniably immoralists.

The Immoralist uses a first-person narrative that provides a biased, selective, and unreliable interpretation of events; its veracity is unconfirmed and it is given retrospectively, after Marceline's death, which Michel indirectly caused. Michel's account suggests that he is not willing to take any responsibility for the impact that his actions have on Marceline and their unborn child. He chose to return to North Africa despite the realization that Marceline's life was rapidly deteriorating, and he observed with fear yet "expectation" as her "fragile life ebbed away" (Gide 112). In short, Michel sacrificed Marceline in order to continue on his aberrant path without the burden of his wife and her strong moral code. Gide invokes Nietzsche's concept of "slave morality," as theorized in *The Genealogy of Morals*, to illuminate Michel's doctrine. According to Nietzsche, the weak wield Christian morality as a tool to force the strong to treat them with compassion and sympathy. As *The Immoralist's* title indicates, Michel openly rejects this Christian morality in order to pursue a life directed by his instincts, unconstrained by guilt or shame, and in doing so, annihilates his wife. Some critics consider Michel to be a latent homosexual who remains unaware of his sexuality, which would consequently garner him more sympathy, however, the unreliability of the account allows Michel's sexual awareness to remain ambiguous to the reader (Guérard, "L'Immoraliste" 128). Significantly, Michel's friends make no comment on his pederastic tendencies, leaving the issue open to the reader's judgment, as Gide intended. However, despite Michel's sacrifice of Marceline, his friends consider whether his "cruel faculties could be turned to good purpose"; remarkably, he seems to be suitable for rehabilitation and a position of high rank (Gide 9).

Like *The Immoralist*, *Death in Venice* is ambiguous in its representation of homosexuality; Mann challenges the established ideas and provides an alternative sexual perspective, yet he does not give an overall judgment of it. However, Mann indicates that Aschenbach chose to pursue a path that led him to behave immorally. Following Aschenbach's thwarted departure from Venice the narrative reveals his "displeasure at his irresolution, his ignorance of his own wishes," in other words, Aschenbach neglects the scruples of his conscience despite recognizing that this decision may be perilous. He rejects the chance to "cleanse his conscience" by warning Tadzio's mother about the risk of cholera; the terrible Bacchanalian dream signifies his fateful surrender to Dionysus and annihilation (Mann 233, 258). Like Michel, Aschenbach's intoxication has led him to relinquish all moral responsibility: "the moral law [is] no longer valid" (Mann 261). While the text does not openly judge Aschenbach, the narrator places himself at an increasing distance, in itself implying disapproval. He mocks the ennobled artist and intellectual, the fallen hero; Aschenbach is reduced to the pitiful spectacle of a crumbling made-up old fop, now mumbling his artistic discourse. Interestingly, Wilper claims that Mann portrays Aschenbach's death as a will to freedom rather than a condemnation of his moral transgression; however, this is not quite the case ("Wilde" 5). The reader is left in no doubt that Aschenbach is corrupt. He has surrendered to Dionysian dissolution; he has lost control. Despite the liberation-rebirth imagery invoked by the image of the sea, Mann ultimately chooses death for his protagonist as the only way to terminate the proliferating moral decay.

In *Modernism and Perversion* Schaffner notes that the homosexual often became a figure of moral corruption, yet some authors challenged this wholly negative image including, it would seem, Gide and Mann (13). Both authors skillfully and subtly disconnect the two facets so that the sexual desire in itself is no longer clearly immoral, although in *The Immoralist* pederasty is associated with several crimes. Instead the immorality lies in the narcissistic focus on the self, and the corresponding sacrifice of others along with the renouncement of the moral code. Both authors partially valorize homosexuality/pederasty; a complete celebration of homosexual desire would not have been tolerated at the time; its positive depiction is therefore circumscribed. The protagonists' fundamental transgression is their failure to stop the relentless pursuit of desire once it became detrimental to the lives of others. This notion reflects the modernist concern with the sickness and depravity of a self-indulgent society.

In conclusion, the subject of homosexuality did not feature in nineteenth-century realist texts, or in the sexually liberal postmodern genre, but it was of key interest to many modernist writers. The focus on homosexuality as a central theme and its ensuing, unraveling psychological decline is ideally suited to the novella form used by Gide and Mann. Mann's text is particularly effective with its formal, rigid and tight structure paralleling Aschenbach's character, which then loosens into a powerful and intense narrative that unravels just as his character does. The depiction of homosexuality as an involuntary,

instinctive force reflects Freud's theories; both texts recognize that sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human existence that directs the lives of individuals.

Tadzio's depiction as an emblem of youth, art, and pure beauty, and the Arab boys' association with health, vitality, freedom and the body, suggests that the boys are life affirming figures rather than erotic objects. The adolescent boy is depicted as a liminal creature, the agent of dangerous excitement, liberty and spiritual transcendence. These representations allow the authors to portray homosexuality in an alternative, more positive way that engages the reader and diminishes antipathy. The inclusion of discreet and sensual erotic images is used to indirectly communicate the perverse nature of the protagonists' desire; the reader perceives the boys with the same subjective sexual gaze as the protagonist, without the narrative needing to be explicit. The images evoke beauty, serenity and modesty and in this sense compel a reconsideration of sexual deviance as a worthy and valid sexual alternative. The valorization of homosexuality and pederasty by virtue of a spiritual and creative renaissance also challenges its negative image.

Both authors incorporate the Nietzschean idea of Apollonian-Dionysian duality to invoke their protagonists' sexual persona, transforming them from being exclusively Apollonian into amoral Dionysian figures. Their sexual inclinations are deemed to be innate and are not judged, however, their narcissism and their actual, or potential, sacrifice of another is condemned. The authors criticize the protagonists' decision to act in relentless pursuit of their sexual desire, which takes them outside the bounds of moral principles to the detriment of others. However, both authors created a literary legacy that expressed and advanced the new perceptions of homosexuality, thus bringing homosexuals out of the shadows, and as Schaffner posits, starting to pave the way for the idea of sexual difference, rather than sexual deviance (*Perversion* 4).

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