

Beauty, Eros, Death

KHC XL 102

Spring 2012

Wednesdays/Fridays 9:00am-10:30am

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Course Description

Beauty fascinates and unsettles. In literature and the arts, the beautiful can ennoble and elevate, but beauty's refinement may also turn bloodless, artificial, even depraved. Erotic attraction to beautiful bodies, also sometimes exalting, can by contrast become all too red-blooded and degenerate into sexual obsession. And why do works of art so often link erotic love to tragic death? Do beauty and eros point toward true fulfillment in life – and is that fulfillment mysteriously linked to mortality? – or are the promises of beauty and desire just seductive lies masking a truth about existence that we cannot bear to face? These perennial questions are nowhere explored at greater cultural density than in the great short work of modern literature at the center of this seminar's inquiry into beauty, desire and extinction: Thomas Mann's 1912 novella *Death in Venice*. Mann's story sets into counterpoint an extraordinary array of prior mythic, literary, philosophical, musical, psychological, historical, biographical and visual inquiries into aesthetics, (homo)eroticism and mortality from Ancient Greece up through Mann's own era. Studying these many works, from the drama of Euripides and the philosophy of Plato up through Wagner's operas, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, and early photography of the male nude, together with "*Death in Venice*" itself and two films and an opera based on it, we will probe enduring questions about the nature and cultural expression of art, life, sexuality and mortality.

All readings and discussion in English. You are encouraged to read or consult the original works (mostly German and Greek) if you can.

Required Texts

Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice*. Tr. Clayton Koelb. Norton. 978-0-393-96013-6

AND ALSO:

Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. Tr. David Luke. Random. 978-0-553-21333-1.



Euripides. *Bacchae*. Tr. Paul Woodruff. Hackett. 978-0-872-20392-1.
 Plato. *Symposium*. Tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Hackett. 978-0-872-20076-0.
 Gilbert Adair, *Love and Death on Long Island*. New York: Grove. 978-0802135926.
 T.J. Reed. *Death in Venice: Making and Unmaking a Master*. Twayne. 0-8057-8114-5.

Reading List

Thomas Mann, "Tristan" (1902); "Tonio Kröger" (1903); "Death in Venice" (1912; read in two different translations); excerpts from letters and essays

Euripides, *The Bacchae* (406 BCE)

*Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (ca. 400 BCE) (excerpts: ¶12.34 - ¶12.54: Funeral Oration, Plague)

Plato, *Symposium* (ca. 380 BCE);

*Phaedrus (ca. 370 BCE) (excerpts)

*Robert Graves, excerpts from *The Greek Myths*

*Plutarch, *Erotikos* (ca. 100 CE)

*Edward Gibbon, excerpts from *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776)

*Johann Joachim Winckelmann, excerpts from *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755)

*Novalis, *Hymn to the Night* 6 (1800)

*Byron, excerpts from *Venetian poems and letters*

*August von Platen, *poems* (1825)

*Richard Wagner, excerpts from *Tristan and Isolde* (opera, 1865)

*Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); *The Case of Wagner*; *poems*

*Henry James, "The Aspern Papers" (1888)

*Stefan George, *poems* (1880's-1890's)

*Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Idyll" (1893)

*Wilhelm von Gloeden, *photographs* (ca. 1885-1914)

*Rainer Maria Rilke, *poems*: "The Courtesan" (1907); "Snake-Charming" (1908)

Georg Simmel, "Venice" ("Venedig"), 1922.

Luchino Visconti, *Death in Venice* (film, 1971)

Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice* (opera, 1973)

Gilbert Adair, *Love and Death on Long Island* (1990)

Richard Kwietniowski, *Love and Death on Long Island* (film, 1996)

Numerous critical essays and excerpts from books

DVD: "Miraculous Canals of Venice" (A&E "Ancient Mysteries" series)

Possibly also:

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*

Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy* (excerpts)

Georg Simmel, "Venice" (1922 essay)

*Texts included in reader or as handouts.

Attendance and Participation

This is a discussion class, and since you cannot discuss when you are not present, absences will lower your grade. So will not speaking up in class. Please don't miss class! And come prepared, and volunteer your thoughts for discussion.

👉 You are allowed only 2 absences before your overall course grade drops.
Spotty attendance is out.

Academic Dishonesty

It is essential that you read and adhere to the student academic conduct code. In particular, several types of plagiarism, i.e., any attempt to represent the thought or words of another as your own, are defined and helpfully illustrated by examples in this academic conduct code.

The Academic Conduct Code can be found at

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>.

My policy: Any student found to have plagiarized will automatically receive an F grade for the course. Presenting others' ideas or words as your own is a grave offense, as well as an insult to your professor and to your own integrity. Cases of plagiarism will also be reported to the Academic Conduct Board and may result in suspension or expulsion from the University. Don't even think about it.

Grading

Participation	10%
Response Papers	5%
Reading Quizzes	5%
Presentation	5%
Short Essay (3-4 pp)	15%
Short Research Essay (5-7 pp)	25%
Final Paper (8-12 pp)	35%

Papers submitted late without prior arrangement will receive lower grades according to their degree of lateness.

Writing Requirements

- Occasional Response Papers (1 page, graded just with a check, plus, or minus)
- Reading Quizzes - unannounced ultra-short quizzes that you'll ace if in fact you did that day's reading
- In-Class Presentation
- 2 Short Essays (ca. 3-4 pp and 5-7 pp respectively)
- 1 Final Paper (8-12 pp)

Papers are to be written in English. Quotations from the works we are reading may be given in the original language (provide bibliographic information identifying your edition) or in the assigned English translation(s).

Course Outline & Readings

* = response paper due this day

wk

- 1 Wed 1/18/12: Introduction
Fri 1/20/12: Plato, Symposium *
- 2 Wed 1/25: Symposium, cont.
Fri 1/27: Mann, Death in Venice
- 3 Wed 2/1: Death in Venice, cont. *
Fri 2/3: Greek myths; Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy
- 4 Wed. 2/8: Nietzsche, cont.; Euripides, The Bacchae *
Fri 2/10: Euripides cont.; Winckelmann, "Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture" *

SHORT ESSAY DUE MON. 2/13 BY 5 PM

- 5 Wed 2/15: Plato, Phaedrus; Plutarch, Erotikos (excerpts)
Fri 2/17: Plato and Plutarch, cont.; von Gloeden
- 6 Wed 2/22: Platen; Venice (Rilke and Nietzsche poems)
Fri 2/24: Byron
- 7 Wed 2/29: Mann, "Tonio Kröger"*
Fri 3/2: Thucydides and pre-WWI Europe ; Décadence: Gibbon, George, Hofmannsthal
- 8 Wed 3/7: Mann, "Tristan" *
SHORT ESSAY DUE THU. 3/8 BY 5 PM
Fri 3/9: "Tristan"; Novalis, "Hymns to the Night" #6

Spring Break March 10-18

- 9 Wed 3/21: Wagner, Tristan and Isolde *
Fri 3/23: Wagner cont.; Wagnerism; Nietzsche and Mann on Wagner

- 10 Wed 3/28: Mann criticism (I) *
Fri 3/30: Mann criticism (II)
- 11 Wed 4/4: Mann criticism (III) *
Fri 4/6: Britten, Death in Venice (opera)
- 12 [Wed 4/18/12: No class meeting; Monday schedule]
Fri 4/20: Visconti, Death in Venice (film)
- 13 Wed 4/25: Adair, Love and Death on Long Island (book); Kwietniowski, Love and
Death on Long Island (film) *
Fri 4/27: Kwietniowski, cont.
- 14 Wed 5/2: Conclusion

FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY MAY 4, 2012 BY 12 NOON
