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**ARTISTS AND BEAUTY: HELLENIC AESTHETIC AND NIETZSCHEAN
INFLUENCES IN THOMAS MANN AND YUKIO MISHIMA**

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Abstract

In the chaotic and war-ridden age of the twentieth century, which paradoxically witnessed a thriving development in world literature, Thomas Mann and Yukio Mishima stood out as two outstanding and representative authors from the Western and Eastern literary realms, respectively. Their works particularly expressed the national spirits of Germany and Japan. Despite their dissimilar cultural backgrounds, Mishima repeatedly acknowledged the influence of Mann, whom he respected highly as “ideal of literature”. This acknowledgment provides a considerable basis for a comparative assessment of these two writers in this research. The research attempts to analyze the parallels and differences in the integration of Eastern and Western aesthetics and philosophical influences in Mishima and Mann’s aesthetics views. Based on the literary works of both authors, this study explores how they articulated the relationship between artists and beauty under the interplay of rationality and emotion, primarily employing Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas and Plato’s aesthetic concepts. At present, there is a conspicuous deficit in worldwide scholarly research in comparative studies of Mishima and Mann, particularly in the context of their cultural and aesthetic ideologies. This paper’s research significance lies in bridging this gap; its purpose is to examine the similarities in their focus on aesthetics, while acknowledging the differences in the underlying thoughts they wished to express, arising from their distinct cultural backgrounds and national perspectives. Through this study, I explore how Mishima’s *Forbidden Colors* and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* contrast with Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, particularly in their treatment of beauty, morality, and the artist’s societal role. My comparative analysis reveals that while both authors grapple with the tension between aesthetic pursuit and ethical responsibility, their approaches are shaped by their respective cultural and philosophical contexts. Mann’s work underscores the tragic consequences of unrestrained desire, whereas Mishima’s novels reflect a more complex relationship between beauty and destruction.

Keywords: Yukio Mishima, Thomas Mann, Nietzscheanism, Aestheticism, Comparative Literature

Resumo

Na era caótica e marcada por guerras do século XX, que paradoxalmente testemunhou um florescimento no desenvolvimento da literatura mundial, Thomas Mann e Yukio Mishima destacaram-se como dois autores excepcionais e representativos dos mundos literários ocidental e oriental, respetivamente. As suas obras expressaram particularmente os espíritos nacionais da Alemanha e do Japão. Apesar das suas diferentes origens culturais, Mishima reconheceu repetidamente a influência de Mann, a quem respeitava profundamente como um “ideal de literatura”. Esse reconhecimento fornece uma base considerável para uma avaliação comparativa destes dois escritores nesta investigação. Nesta investigação, procuro analisar os paralelismos e as diferenças na integração das influências estéticas e filosóficas orientais e ocidentais nas visões estéticas de Mishima e Mann. Com base nas obras literárias de ambos os autores, exploro como articularam a relação entre os artistas e a beleza sob a interação entre racionalidade e emoção, recorrendo principalmente às ideias filosóficas de Nietzsche e aos conceitos estéticos de Platão. Atualmente, há um défice notório de investigações académicas comparativas entre Mishima e Mann no contexto das suas ideologias culturais e estéticas. A relevância deste trabalho reside em colmatar esta lacuna. O meu propósito é examinar as semelhanças no foco estético de ambos, bem como reconhecer as diferenças nos pensamentos subjacentes que pretendiam expressar, resultantes das suas distintas origens culturais e perspetivas nacionais. Através deste estudo, exploro como *Cores Proibidas* e *O Pavilhão Dourado* de Mishima contrastam com *A Morte em Veneza* de Thomas Mann, particularmente no tratamento da beleza, moralidade e o papel do artista na sociedade. A minha análise comparativa revela que, enquanto ambos os autores lidam com a tensão entre a busca estética e a responsabilidade ética, as suas abordagens são moldadas pelos respetivos contextos culturais e filosóficos. A obra de Mann sublinha as consequências trágicas do desejo desmedido, enquanto os romances de Mishima refletem uma relação mais complexa entre a beleza e a destruição.

Palavras-chave: Yukio Mishima, Thomas Mann, Nietzscheanismo, Esteticismo, Literatura Comparada

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ぼくは「芸術と生活の二元論」というか、そういう考えを
トーマス・マンなんかに教わったわけです。

[I was taught the dualism of art and life by Thomas Mann and
others.]

Yukio Mishima

「小説家は銀行家のやうな風體をしてゐなくてはならぬ」
と教へたトーマス・マンの文學が、このころから、私の理
想の文學になりつつあつた。

[Thomas Mann's literature, which taught that "novelists must
have the appearance of bankers", was becoming my ideal of
literature from this time.]

Yukio Mishima

Introduction

When I read Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, the dazzling beauty and its seductive power left a profound impression on me. Later, when I discovered Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956), its vivid depiction of beauty once again stirred within me a powerful emotional experience of beauty conveyed through words.

Both authors, through their unique expressions, revealed to me that the artist is not only a follower of beauty but a martyr, sacrificed to it.

In the works of these two writers, the artist's struggle with beauty resonates deeply with me. The artist, while experiencing the sublime and ideal power of beauty, also suffers from their own desires. This paradox fascinates me, as it exposes the conflict between the pursuit of artistic beauty and the effort to maintain one's own survival—a conflict at the core of the exploration of beauty itself.

Thus, the concept of beauty can be used as a bridge to explore the aesthetic connections between these two authors.

This study aims to reveal the similarities between the two authors under shared influences and explore how their aesthetic differences stem from their diverse cultural backgrounds. By focusing on Mishima's *Forbidden Colors* (1951) and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, it discusses the commonalities between the two writers as artists within different cultural contexts and how their roots in German and Japanese cultures shape their distinct understandings and expressions of aesthetic issues and social relations.

Yukio Mishima, a prominent figure in contemporary Japanese literature, was most active during the mid-20th century, a time characterized by significant upheaval and change. Born in 1925, Mishima witnessed intimately the transformation of Japan from a militaristic society to a period of post-war reconstruction during the Showa era. His ideas and deeds were deeply shaped by the cultural shifts of this era, including the conflict between tradition and modernization, as well as the examination of national identity and personal self. His profound worship for traditional Japanese ideals, particularly the pursuit of the Bushido, sharply contrasted with the rapid Westernization and industrialization of post-war Japan. In light of this context, Mishima made efforts to rejuvenate Japanese traditional culture and promote a sense of national identity. His works often centered on articulating conventional Japanese ideals and aesthetic concepts, harmoniously merging with creative concepts assimilated from Western works. He revolutionized the form and content of art and literature, aiming to rejuvenate traditional Japanese literature by incorporating fresh energy within a contemporary framework.

Thomas Mann, a celebrated German author of the 20th century, was born in Lübeck under the German Empire and came of age in the last years of the Wilhelm era. He lived through two world wars, and his works were strongly shaped by the historical and philosophical trends of Europe during that time. Observing the onset of World War I and Germany's subsequent defeat had a tremendous impact on his thinking and writing. Mann has an outstanding talent in portraying human spiritual condition and ideological conflicts within distinct cultural and social circumstances through his intellectually profound works of literature. His works reflected the turbulent political climate and existential challenges faced by artists in German

society at that era, illustrating the transformation of German culture and society, as well as the moral issues and decisions made by individuals against a wide historical context.

Yukio Mishima has attracted the interest of researchers worldwide due to his distinctive personal experiences and innovative writing style. The examination of his contentious suicide and extreme artistic perspectives has been ongoing. The author's literary works have been translated into numerous languages, including English, French, and German, and have received multiple adaptations and revisions. The French writer Marguerite Yourcenar highly admired Mishima, recognizing him as "a true representative of Japan"(Yourcenar, 2001:3). She acknowledged that Japan had undergone a profound Westernization, yet it had managed to preserve certain unchanging qualities. The traditional Japanese elements within Mishima erupted in his death, making him a hero and martyr who stood against the currents of modern Japan. Presently, Western scholarly investigation of Mishima predominantly centers on his biography and personal encounters, while also looking into his aesthetic and philosophical ideas.

In selecting biographical and critical works on Yukio Mishima, my primary focus has been on sources that emphasize an understanding of his aesthetics and his engagement with Western philosophy. For the references on Thomas Mann, I have prioritized works that explore the shared influences on both authors, such as Nietzsche's philosophy and Greek classical aesthetics. Additionally, I have chosen sources that facilitate a comparative analysis, aimed at uncovering the differences between the two writers.

Research on Yukio Mishima includes literary works such as *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (1974) by Henry Scott Stokes, a British journalist with a close connection to Mishima, and *Mishima: A Biography* (1974) by author John Nathan, a translator. In *Mishima: A Vision of the Void* (1981), French author Marguerite Yourcenar further explored Mishima's personal experiences and artistic ideas. Recently, the focus of inquiry has transitioned from examining his personal life to engaging in discussions about his intellectual concepts. In *Mishima, Aesthetic Terrorist: An Intellectual Portrait* (2018), British author Andrew Rankin examines Mishima's aesthetic beliefs and cultural outlook. Meanwhile, British researcher Roy Starrs delves into Mishima's incorporation and evolution of Nietzsche's philosophical concepts in his article "Nietzschean Dialectics in the Novels of Mishima Yukio"(1991).

Regarding Thomas Mann's research: notable in the field of Thomas Mann studies are books such as *Mein Vater, der Zauberer* (1956) by Erika Mann, his daughter, which contains numerous letters and essays unpublished before. Frederico Lourenço's article "A Morte Em Veneza de Thomas Mann, Novela Homérica" (2008) is relevant to my study because it explores Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, focusing on the connections between the novel and classical Greek culture and Nietzsche's philosophical ideas. Daemmrich's "Friedrich Schiller and Thomas Mann: Parallels in Aesthetics" (1965) examines how Mann incorporated aesthetic concepts from Schiller. Furthermore, Jeffrey Meyer's "Thomas Mann's Artist-Stories" (2013) scrutinizes Mann's viewpoint on the correlation between artists and life in his literary compositions.

Crucial to my dissertation are analyses in connection with Mann and Mishima: the scholarly study "Yukio Mishima and Thomas Mann" by Japanese academic Hayashi Susumu provides a comprehensive analysis of the ideas and creative creations of both authors. In his essay "Thomas Mann and Yukio Mishima", Keita Fukumoto, a professor at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, explores the impact of Mann's ideas on Mishima, particularly regarding the artist's reception of Mann's beliefs. To summarize, there have been little comparative studies of these two subjects in Western academia. However, research in the Japanese academic sphere is relatively outdated, particularly in terms of investigating the connections between their aesthetic and philosophical ideas. The existence of this gap highlights the substantial research opportunities and possibilities in the comparative analysis of Yukio Mishima and Thomas Mann.

In analyzing *Death in Venice*, this study employs Michael Henry Heim's translation from 2004. This latest translation strives to retain the style of Thomas Mann's original text while offering a smooth and elegant English rendition, which facilitates a more accurate conveyance of the subtle emotions and profound philosophical reflections in Mann's work.

At the same time, this study focuses exclusively on the portrayal of Aschenbach in Mann's original text and does not consider the 1971 film adaptation directed by Luchino Visconti. As Lourenço points out, Visconti's adaptation introduces certain misleading images that can cause readers to confuse Aschenbach's character in the novel with his cinematic portrayal. (cf. Lourenço, 2008: 211-213) Furthermore, when the film was released in 1971, Yukio Mishima had already passed away, making it impossible for him to be influenced by the film.

For Mishima's works, this study utilizes the only available English translations: Alfred H. Marks's translation of *Forbidden Colors* and Ivan Morris's translation of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. Where other translations are unavailable, this study supplements the analysis with my own translations from the original Japanese text. Additionally, for some works that could not be accessed, this study relies on citations from other authoritative critics' analyses to ensure an accurate understanding of the original text and maintain the integrity of the analysis.

This research will analyze structural and thematic parallels in their texts, with particular emphasis on their shared focus on beauty and the artist's role.

Additionally, by studying Mishima's and Mann's non-literary works—such as speeches, interviews, and essays—this study explores their engagement with Nietzschean philosophy, particularly the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy, and its influence on their worldviews. It examines how these theories shaped their artistic visions. Both authors were deeply influenced by Platonic aesthetics, which is evident in their depiction of the tension between ideal and real beauty—a central theme in the lives of their characters.

In Chapter 1, I will introduce the research background and the life and literary achievements of both authors; Chapters 2 and 3 provide an in-depth analysis of the artists' pursuit of aesthetics in *Death in Venice* and *Forbidden Colors* respectively; Chapter 4 examines both author's reception and interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas and critiques of the relationship between the artist and society. In conclusion, the concept of beauty serves as a critical framework for understanding the artistic visions of Thomas Mann and Yukio Mishima, highlighting both their shared influences and their distinct cultural interpretations.

1. The Authors and Their Works

1.1. Thomas Mann and His Works

In the aftermath of two world wars, European society experienced a widespread spiritual crisis. Literary figures began to explore solutions to the prevailing intellectual malaise by adopting expressions vastly different from past literary styles. Modern literary movements such as Expressionism emerged and became the vanguard of a transformative era in European literature. Meanwhile, the renowned German author Thomas Mann (1875-1955) witnessed the shift in European literary currents from traditional to innovative. Mann's lifetime spanned the first half of the 20th century, and as the last inheritor of German traditional literature, he continually drew inspiration from the ideas and works of prominent German artists like Goethe, Schiller, and Wagner. He did not fully embrace the contemporary modernist currents in Europe at the time, instead persisting in grounding his literary creations on the notion of the German national spirit.¹

With his artistic sensitivity and genius for creation, Thomas Mann produced remarkable works like *Buddenbrooks* in his youth, based on his own experiences. This novel devoid of the immaturity typical of young authors, employed meticulous description and witty satire to depict the rise and fall of the European bourgeoisie. Published in 1901, it chronicles the decline of a merchant family over four generations in Lübeck, Germany, reflecting the societal changes within the German bourgeoisie at the end of the 19th century. *Buddenbrooks* is not merely a family saga; it also foretells the future of the European bourgeoisie. Through this novel, Mann not only achieved immense prestige in Germany and worldwide but also awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929.

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With the outbreak of World War I, Mann was influenced by the prevalent nationalist ideas in Germany, publishing essays such as “Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man (Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen)” and expressing views that portrayed Germany’s involvement in the war as an act of defending its national culture and spiritual traditions. These publications led to significant criticism and a rift between him and his brother, Heinrich Mann. However, as the war progressed, especially after Germany’s defeat and the establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1918, Mann’s perspectives shifted. He began to reconsider his wartime viewpoints and gradually became a supporter of the democratic ideals of the Weimar Republic, openly criticizing and opposing the rise of extreme nationalism. Regarding his political transformation, Mann explained in “Meine Zeit”:

Fand ich mich als Verteidiger der demokratischen Republik, dieses schwachen Geschöpfes der Niederlage, und als Anti-Nationalist, ohne daß ich irgendeines Bruches in meiner Existenz gewahr geworden wäre, ohne das leiseste Gefühl, daß ich irgend etwas abzuschwören gehabt hätte. Gerade der Antihumanismus der Zeit machte mir klar, daß ich nie etwas getan hatte oder doch hatte tun wollen —, als die Humanität zu verteidigen. Ich werde nie etwas anderes tun. (1950: 297) [I found myself defending the democratic republic, that weak creature of defeat, and being an anti-nationalist, without having become aware of any break in my existence, without the slightest feeling that I had had to renounce anything. It was precisely the anti-humanism of the time that made me realize that I had never done anything, or at least had never wanted to do anything, more than defend humanity. I will never do anything else.]

This eminent writer never approached his “political” viewpoints from a purely political angle but rather from a position of preserving the national spirit. As an initially uninvolved *apolitical* figure, Thomas Mann shifted the focus of his literary creation towards the discussion and contemplation of individual morality and social responsibility. In *The Magic Mountain* (1924), a “time-novel”(Zeitroman), Mann extended his observational scope from Germany to Europe at large, reflecting the various prevailing intellectual currents and social phenomena of the era. The novel not only explores the meaning of human existence but also reveals a series of prominent social issues in the 20th century, such as the cultural and societal crises, decadence, plight of the human spirit and the meaning of life.

Engrossed in the study of human moral issues, Thomas Mann was forced to confront a harsh reality: the Nazis, led by Hitler, seized power in Germany. As mentioned earlier, Mann had repeatedly publicly criticized the dangers of *National Socialism* disguised under its ideology. Under the oppressive rule of the Nazi regime, to continue spreading the light of humanism,

Mann had to embark on a path of exile with his family. In the distant United States, Thomas Mann found asylum and temporarily settled, continuing his literary work. Despite being accused by many of betraying his homeland, Mann remained deeply connected to Germany. He chose to make efforts to enable more foreigners to understand his homeland, as he did in his English report titled “Germany and the Germans”:

[...] there are not two Germanys, a good one and a bad one, but only one, whose best turned into evil through devilish cunning. Wicked Germany is merely good Germany gone astray, good Germany in misfortune, in guilt, and ruin.

Not a word of all that I have just told you about Germany or tried to indicate to you, came out of alien, cool, objective knowledge, it is all within me, I have been through it all. (1945: 18-19)

During his exile, Mann felt a deep nostalgia for the noble qualities that once pervaded Germany in its better days. With a longing for the past and a hope for the revival of the national spirit, Thomas Mann sought to “resurrect” those great artists representing the German *zeitgeist* in his subsequent works. By intertwining his thoughts with those of the masters through his writing, he created characters such as Goethe in *Lotte in Weimar* (1939), embodying both Goethe and Thomas Mann himself. In this work, Mann uses the self-narration of the fictionalized Goethe and the metaphor of “the moth and the fatal, luring flame”(Mann, 1939:341) to reflect on the relationship between art and personal values. Through these works, Mann not only explored the deep connections between genius individuals and history and national culture but also expressed his pride in the German national spirit epitomized by figures like Goethe. As he responded to Volkmar Hansen’s question on February 21, 1938: “Where I am, there is Germany.”(Hansen, 1991:176) In the works of Thomas Mann, not only is there a profound insight into social issues, but a passion for art also forms the core theme of his literary creation. His literary world is imbued with respect and praise for the great artists who have shaped the symbols of the German spirit. As his daughter, Erika Mann, wrote in the preface to *The Autobiographical Writings of Thomas Mann*, “Vorwort zu Thomas Mann, «Autobiographisches»”:

Nun, nicht von ungefähr hat T. M. seinen literaturkritischen Bemühungen den Sammeltitle «Huldigungen und Kränze» gegeben. Es waren lauter von ihm verehrte, geliebte Geister, denen er sich zuwandte, — natürlich nicht, weil sie ihm fremd und unzugänglich gewesen wären, sondern auf Grund einer als stark empfundenen Affinität. (1968: 368) [Well, it is no coincidence that T. M. gave his literary-critical

endeavors the collective title “Homages and Wreaths.” He addressed only revered and beloved minds, not because they were foreign and inaccessible to him, but because of a strongly felt affinity.]

In Mann’s early work on the issue of the artist, *Death in Venice* (1912), the protagonist Aschenbach clearly reflects the image of the German composer Mahler. In this work, filled with the air of Romanticism, Mann vividly portrays the artist’s pursuit of beauty, integrating themes of beauty that were prevalent in European artistic expression from the 19th to the 20th century. Through Aschenbach’s fate, Mann explores the relationship between the artist’s spirit and body.

In his later years, during his period of exile, Thomas Mann devoted himself to writing *Doktor Faustus*, wherein he crafted the character of Adrian Leverkühn as both a tragically suffering genius akin to Nietzsche and a figure possessing Wagner’s passion and creativity for music. These works serve not only as hymns to the immortal artists representing the German spirit but also emphasize the inseparable link between art and the fate of the German nation and people. This profound exploration showcases how Thomas Mann, through his literary works, delved into and reflected the complex relationships between art and life, the individual and society. Thomas Mann was both a witness to and a recorder of the tumultuous social transformations in 20th century Europe. Through his works, he reflected on and pondered the sharp and complex social issues from the early to mid-20th century. Mann’s deep exploration of themes such as the individual versus society, art versus politics allowed him to critically reflect on human nature, morality, and social responsibility. Thomas Mann’s literary works are key for modern individuals to understand the societal, historical, and cultural shifts in 20th century Europe. Furthermore, his writings inspire ongoing creation in modern literature on themes such as art, individual values, and social responsibility.

1.2. Yukio Mishima and His Works

Yukio Mishima (1925-1970), born Kimitake Hiraoka, was a Japanese novelist, playwright, journalist, and film producer. As one of the most internationally renowned Japanese writers of the 20th century, Mishima’s life and works radiate a unique charm, attracting extensive attention from literary critics and readers both in Japan and worldwide.

Yukio Mishima was born into a declining aristocratic family, with a grandfather who was a government official forced to resign due to embezzlement, and a grandmother from a samurai family. However, Mishima did not enjoy the superior life of an aristocratic family. Following his birth, his family quickly declined due to his grandfather's mistakes, and his parents' mediocrity failed to restore the family's former glory. Unlike other children of his time, Mishima was confined to his stubborn grandmother's room throughout the year, with his mother barely able to meet him. He received a traditional aristocratic education from his grandmother from an early age, even attending a traditional aristocratic school chosen by her. The physically frail Mishima not only had to care for his grandmother, who suffered from illness, but also endure her neurotic temperaments. This isolated upbringing made Mishima introverted and sensitive from a young age. Accompanied by illness since childhood, Mishima found resonance in the works of modern European authors such as Oscar Wilde and Raymond Radiguet, whose works were filled with romantic and mysterious elements. He was immersed in the world of literature, projecting his fantasies about the outside world onto bizarre Japanese tales, European fairy tales, dramas, and poems. He saw the figures of Japanese samurai in the knight tales of the Middle Ages. While being influenced by traditional Japanese thoughts, he also drew a great deal of spiritual nourishment from European literary works, displaying a genius-like writing ability in his childhood. At the age of twelve, he published the work 酸模 (すかんぽう) ~秋彦の幼き思ひ出 [Sukanpo – Akihiko's childhood memories] (1938), using a naive touch to explore the themes of innocence, and the dichotomy of good and evil.

During his school years, Mishima became more active in his literary pursuits, publishing numerous works in the school magazine. Although he had not yet developed a mature and cohesive style, his works were appreciated by the school's teachers for their delicate and elegant prose. In 1944, upon graduating from high school with excellent grades, he received a silver watch directly from the Emperor of Japan. This personal encounter with the Japanese Emperor left a lasting impression on the young Mishima. From then on, the divine image of the Emperor, as portrayed by his grandmother, overlapped with the real figure, becoming the most inviolable authority in his heart.

As World War II erupted, influenced by the nationalist sentiment and Japanese Romantics School (Nihon Roman-ha), Mishima's literary works began to focus more on the value and significance of "death." Mishima placed the *ultimate value*, as esteemed by the Japanese

Romantics School, in his potential future of dying on the battlefield. He saw noble qualities similar to the *loyalty* spirit of Japanese samurai in soldiers who sacrificed their lives on foreign battlefields. Having grown up in the *feudal society* dream woven by his grandmother, he longed to use the war to prove his courage and will through death. However, his dream of *dying gloriously on the battlefield* was shattered due to his disqualification in the military physical examination, profoundly affecting his subsequent literary creation and real life. On the one hand, this incident branded him as a *coward*, leaving him with lifelong regret and remorse. This sense of shame gradually evolved into an extreme and frenzied pursuit of an idealized spirit of Bushido. On the other hand, his unique wartime experience further shaped his violent aesthetic perspective. As he proclaimed in his semi-autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949): “But my heart’s leaning toward Death and Night and Blood would not be denied.”(Mishima, 1977: 22) Mishima’s unique and abnormal recognition of beauty is vividly reflected in his literary works. In many of his works, the conceptual beauty is to be expressed through the form of death, with detailed descriptions of the process and scenes of death to better showcase the beauty of destruction. However, not all deaths possess the characteristics of beauty. Only what he considered violent, extreme, and even somewhat brutal death, in the realm beyond the moral codes of good and evil, could reveal the true beauty.

His debut work during the war, *The Forest in Full Bloom* (1944), marked his formal entry into the Japanese literary scene. This collection of short stories displays Mishima’s classical aesthetics and reverence for the noble ancestors who represent Japan’s glorious past. Moreover, the work begins to show Mishima’s preliminary understanding of beauty, life, and death. In this narrative, the harmonious beauty of life, fleeting like blooming flowers, and death no longer signifies the end of life but becomes the nourishment for creating beauty that transcends life, embodying a deeper meaning.

With the end of the war, everything returned to its former calm. However, compared to the war’s enticing, tense, and thrilling experiences filled with the allure of death, the monotony of post-war life exuded the dangerous scent of materialism and the money worship that has arisen from the influence of the United States, he strangely longed for the extreme experiences of wartime—not a yearning for war itself but a desire for life to bloom swiftly and then fade. In his post-war works, such as *Confessions of a Mask* and *Kyoko’s House* (1959), he attempted to move beyond the perspective of a bystander observing the deaths of others. Instead, starting from personal experiences of masochism and sexual fantasies, he brought the pursuit of beauty

from the external to the internal, delving deeper into self-awareness and reflecting the irreconcilable conflict between the individual and society, and the multifaceted nature of humans. With the success of *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima gained wide recognition in the Japanese literary world, but his personal life and views also attracted more public attention and criticism.

Following this work, Mishima shifted his focus to more macroscopic themes, beginning to ponder conceptual questions such as the dilemma of traditional continuity in modernity and the meaning of individual existence.

Published in 1956, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is based on a sensational crime in Japan, delving into the complex relationship between the essence of beauty and destruction through an analysis and speculation of the arsonist's psyche—a young monk named Mizoguchi. This work explores the identity crisis faced by the spiritually empty and decadent youth of post-war Japanese society, achieving tremendous success both domestically and internationally, thereby garnering more global attention for Mishima. For this work, Mishima deeply studied Buddhist philosophy, seeking traces of the preservation of traditional Japanese spirit within Zen culture, and infused the ideas he drew from Buddhism into his subsequent works.

As his dissatisfaction with modern Japanese society intensified, Mishima began to search for a spiritual foundation to restore national honor in classical Japanese literature and Bushido (the way of the warrior). His increasing focus on ritualistic death—themes of self-sacrifice—is evident in his rewriting of Japanese classic *Hagakure* (id.) and the publication of *Patriotism* (1960) inspired by the *February 26 Incident*, which advocates the *loyalty and honor* spirit of Bushido. In his *The Sea of Fertility* tetralogy, Mishima integrates his complex understanding of life and death, beauty and nothingness, into this series that symbolizes his ultimate pursuit of beauty and the exploration of the meaning of life. This series, including *Spring Snow* (1965), *Runaway Horses* (1967), *The Temple of Dawn* (1969), and *The Decay of the Angel* (1971), spans the Taisho era to the early Showa period. Through the depiction of numerous characters' destinies, it shows the transformation experienced by Japanese society during this period, presenting individuals' struggles at historical turning points. While Mishima displayed a desire to restore Japan's traditional values and noble spirit in the first few works, he expressed concerns for Japan's future and the hopelessness of restoring the national spirit

with a Buddhist nihilistic ending in the last work. This shift in thought also hinted at his choice of ending his own life.

In Yukio Mishima's body of work, despite the creation of *The Sound of Waves* (1954), which celebrates the beauty of life influenced by ancient Greek culture, most of his works, including essays, poetry, novels, and plays, primarily explore the theme of death, especially how a meaningful death can confer value on life. As written in *Hagakure*:

“While we live, death is irrelevant; when we are dead, we do not exist. There is no reason to fear death.”(Mishima, 1977:81) Mishima attempted to delve into the concept of death, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of his life and his aesthetic view.

2. Artist's Pursuit of Beauty in *Death in Venice* of Thomas Mann

Yukio Mishima, when discussing the aesthetic characteristics expressed in Japanese Noh theater, referred to Thomas Mann's famous work *Death in Venice*: "True beauty is something that attacks, overpowers, robs, and finally destroys. It was because he knew this violent quality of beauty that Thomas Mann wrote *Death in Venice* (...)"(apud. Stokes, 2000:199). The aesthetic perspective demonstrated by Mann in *Death in Venice* profoundly influenced Mishima's thinking, which is evident in his work *Forbidden Colors* from the period of transition of his literary style. Here, Mishima adopts and further develops the aesthetic features of classical and modern fusion and the aesthetics of death conveyed in *Death in Venice*. Therefore, a thorough study of the aesthetic ideas presented in *Death in Venice* shows great importance in understanding the aesthetic similarities between Thomas Mann and Mishima. This, in turn, enhances our comprehension of Mann's significant impact on Mishima's literary creation.

Death in Venice, one of Thomas Mann's signature works, is highly regarded not only in Germany but also in the world literature. Published in 1912, the novella is based on Mann's own experiences during a visit to Venice in 1911. Through its portrayal of the protagonist Aschenbach, a writer, the novella explores the changes in his inner thoughts and external behaviors and his pursuit of beauty, reflecting the author's contemplation on the questions between artists and art, beauty and spirit. The themes discussed primarily revolve around the life of the artist and his relationship with artistic creation, making it an allegorical novella about artists.

The analysis in aesthetic is crucial for understanding how aesthetic themes are interwoven with the text and play a significant role in the identity construction of the characters within the novella. For example, Gary Johnson's "*Death in Venice* and the aesthetics correlative"(2004) provides an advanced analysis of the aesthetic issues in the novella, highlighting that aesthetic questions hold a central position and significantly influence the broader thematic structure of the work. Johnson elucidates Thomas Mann's engagement with the aesthetic theories of Winckelmann, Schiller, and Lessing.

Thomas Mann once noted in his preface to *Stories of Three Decades* (1922):

Death in Venice is indeed a crystallization in the true sense of the word; it is a structure, and an image, shedding light from so many facets, by its nature of such inexhaustible allusiveness, that it might well dazzle the eyes of its creator himself as it took shape. (Mann, 1936: viii)

Similar to his own commentary on the novella, the dazzling and alluring beauty conveyed to the readers is composed of light rays in various colors refracted through many facets, rather than a mere inheritance of a single aesthetic tradition.

2.1. The Beauty of Nature

The depiction of landscapes in the novella, which showcases classical aesthetic natural features, is indispensable for understanding the aesthetic concepts expressed by the author. Throughout the novella, there are numerous descriptions of Venice's natural scenery:

Day after day now the god with the flaming cheeks soared upward naked, driving his team of four fire-breathing horses through heaven's acres, his yellow ringlets fluttering wild in the gale of the east wind. ... Then he would feel he had indeed been whisked off to the land of Elysium, to the ends of the earth, where man is granted a life of ease, where there is no snow nor yet winter, no tempest, no pouring rain, but only the cool gentle breath released by Oceanus, and the days flow past in blissful idleness, effortless, free of strife, and consecrated solely to the sun and its feasts. (Mann, 2005:75-77)

The author, by depicting an idealized natural setting, where figures such as the god of sun and Oceanus are mentioned, ties the natural beauty to the classical aesthetic tradition. For example, following a tradition that streams from Heraclitus and Plato. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz in *The Great Theories and Decline of Beauty* summarizes: "Heraclitus held that nature is a symphony, and that art was but an imitation of it. Plato opposed the modification of any natural forms for artistic purposes." (Tatarkiewicz, 1972: 169)

The scene enhances the moving beauty of nature in Venice, highlighting its aesthetic value and impact on artistic representation. This approach presents the readers with a state of classical artistic and natural harmony.

As Frederico Lourenço mentions in his article "A Morte em Veneza, novela homérica", the beauty of the natural landscape in Venice corresponds to the ancient Greek "Elysian fields", implying a potential connection:

Mann substitui o final homérico da sequência poética por uma formulação da sua autoria, que lembra,

curiosamente, a vida dos bem-aventurados na Olímpica II de Píndaro (vv. 62-63), esses que, “gozando a luz do sol em dias sempre iguais.”(como de resto Aschenbach em Veneza’), “recebem existência menos penosa” [Mann replaces the Homeric ending of the poetic sequence with a formulation of his own, which is curiously reminiscent of the life of the blessed in Pindaro’s Olympica (CHECK HERE: <https://topostext.org/work/18>) II (vv. 62-63), those who, “enjoying the sunlight on days that are always the same”(like Aschenbach in Venice), “receive a less painful existence](Lourenço, 2008: 221)

This condition embodies the harmonious and pure arcadian beauty celebrated by ancient Greeks. Beyond the mentioned depictions of nature, the artistic rendering of Venice’s natural beauty permeates the entire novella. This exotic city becomes the ideal residence for Aschenbach, a retreat from his disciplined, solemn life, continuously stimulating the hedonistic desires he had repressed since his youth.

The serene and free natural beauty of Venice yet at the same time symbolizes Aschenbach’s negative shift in his attitude towards his life as an artist. Once disdainful of Venice’s indulgent lifestyle and maintaining a self-critical and restrained demeanor, Aschenbach now finds himself addicted to it. The sun is consistently obscured by clouds, symbolizing the intense internal struggle between his rationality and desires. Aschenbach strives to resist the decadent life Venice brings; the overcast skies and the unhealthy air seem to urge him to leave this unsuitable life and return to his self-controlled life in his residence in Munich.

2.2. “Fate” in Aschenbach’s Journey

Another key character in the novella, Tadzio, symbolizes the embodiment of the beauty of ideas that Aschenbach pursues beyond art. His beauty shares the same essence with the natural beauty in Venice, embodying a beauty of ideal that transcends artificial constructs and human interference.

Tadzio’s pure and flawless beauty gradually captivates Aschenbach, yet he has not realized that Tadzio is the embodiment of the artistic beauty he seeks. Despite needing to leave Venice for health reasons, even to the point of developing a fever, reason tells him he must depart. Although he decides to leave, he grows increasingly regretful on the way. He initially believes his reluctance to leave is due to Venice’s allure, but gradually he realizes it is Tadzio who truly holds him back. After a mishap with his luggage, “turned round and spirited back by a quirk of fate,” we can see that “fate” plays an important role in the story. The novella’s title, *Death in Venice*, can be seen as a prophecy of Aschenbach’s fate. As Lourenço reveals to us, the journey to Venice was destined to be a journey towards death from the very beginning:

Trata-se da própria gôndola que, associada pelo narrador a um caixão. (homenagem aos *Epigramas Venezianos* de Goethe?), 'lembra ainda mais a própria morte' (...) O gondoleiro a quem incumbe o leme desta gôndola caixão é a mais sinistra das sinistras figuras com que Aschenbach se depara na viagem a Veneza. (...) , como fantasma que se materializa naquele momento, para assumir junto de Aschenbach o papel de Caronte.[This is the very gondola which, associated by the narrator with a coffin (a tribute to Goethe's Venetian Epigrams?), 'recalls even more the idea of death itself' (...) The gondolier tasked with steering this coffin-like gondola is the most sinister of the sinister figures Aschenbach encounters on his journey to Venice. (...) , like a ghost materializing at that moment to assume the role of Charon alongside Aschenbach.](Lourenço, 2008: 221)

When Aschenbach finally decides to leave Venice, his luggage is mistakenly handled by the hotel, forcing him to return and wait for it. This seemingly coincidental event is actually a twist of fate. He returns to Venice, no longer attempting to escape, accepting his destiny and continuing to immerse himself in his obsession with Tadzio.

As Aschenbach returns to Tadzio, the crisis miraculously resolves, and desire gains the predominant position in his psychological struggle, leading him to indulge in Venice's pleasures. The continuous rain turns into clear skies as his troubles dissipate. At this point, Venice no longer appears as a place to flee from but as an idyllic haven where one can abandon all responsibilities and wholly immerse in a life of emptiness and indulgence. Through this symbolic environmental change, emulating the style of classical Greek works, the author subtly portrays Aschenbach's transition from a rational artist to a servant of his desire.

2.3. The Classical Beauty of Sculpture in Tadzio

Moreover, it's important to note the recurring imagery of the sun/sunlight in these descriptions of natural scenery. The sun not only holds positive meanings of light and vitality in ancient Greek culture but also symbolizes the Greeks' worship of Apollo, the sun god. Apollo plays a significant role in ancient Greek art and, as the god of art and music, inspires many artists and is a frequent subject of sculpture. His youthful, idealized form also symbolizes the perfect beauty pursued by ancient Greeks. Tadzio shares a similarity to the divine and pure beauty represented by Apollo. In the text, it is evident that in addition to the classical beauty portrayed through natural scenery, the physical beauty contained in ancient Greek sculpture is an indispensable component of beauty, even highly celebrated. This external beauty is primarily

manifested in Tadzio, the object of Aschenbach's desires and artistic ideals.

The repeated narratives of the external artistic beauty and classical natural beauty that Aschenbach perceives in Tadzio are equally significant. When Aschenbach describes the appearance of the young boy he sees, he frequently compares his body to that of an ancient Greek statue, elevates his attractiveness to a realm that transcends mere human physical beauty, like in the scene when Aschenbach first encounters Tadzio:

[...] his face—pale and charmingly reticent, ringed by honey-colored hair, with a straight nose, lovely mouth, and an expression of gravity sweet and divine—recalled Greek statuary of the noblest period, yet its purest formal perfection notwithstanding it conveyed a unique personal charm such that whoever might gaze upon it would believe he had never beheld anything so accomplished, be it in nature or in art. ...His complexion stood out white as ivory against the darker gold of the surrounding curls. (Mann, 2005:45-47)

Ancient Greek artists mimicked the beauty of the human body through sculpture, though artificially created, but surpassing the object of the imitation, they contain a noble spirit that transcends physical beauty. According to the views of the German art critic Winckelmann,

“[i]t is not only Nature which the votaries of the Greeks find in their works, but still more, something superior to nature; ideal beauties, brain-born images.

[...] The Expression of so great a soul is beyond the force of mere nature. It was in his own mind the artist was to search for the strength of spirit with which he marked his marble.”(Winckelmann, 2022: 4-5,31-32)

Greek marble statues are whiter and purer than human skin, emphasizing a harmony of motion and stillness. These sculptures capture a sequence of movements within a static form, creating bodies that appear more perfect and noble than those of living beings. This artistic approach not only idealizes physical form but also embodies the Greek ideals of beauty and perfection, where the statues represent not just human figures but a higher state of the human condition. Later in the text, the narrator describes Tadzio's head “with the creamy glaze of Parian marble”(Mann, 2005:52), further emphasizing the statue-like perfection that distinguishes him from ordinary humans. Ancient Greek valued harmony and symmetry in beauty,

“The Pythagoreans,” as a later writer remarks, “found the properties and relations of harmony in numbers.” They maintained that “order and proportion are beautiful and fitting,” and that “thanks to numbers, everything looks beautiful. (Tatarkiewicz, 1972: 167)

In the field of sculpture, this concept was further enhanced by their discovery of “The Golden Ratio”, applying this theory to express the harmonious beauty of the human form through statues. Plato indeed incorporated this concept from Pythagorean philosophy into his own ideas, “all that is good is beautiful and what is beautiful is ... well-proportioned”(Plato, 2010, 87c4-6). When Aschenbach views Tadzio as a symbol of spiritual beauty, he mentions: “Cupid truly did as mathematicians do when they show concrete images of pure forms to incompetent pupils”(Mann, 2005:82) This compares Cupid to a mathematician clearly emphasizes Tadzio’s harmonious physical beauty, akin to that of a Greek statue, and bestows upon Tadzio a transcendent, immortal quality, imbuing it with the timeless nature of a statue.

Furthermore, the analogy of the god of love as a mathematician, using concrete imagery to explain abstract mathematical concepts to “incompetent pupils”(i.e., Aschenbach), transports us to a teaching scene in Plato’s *Republic*, putting the debate over ideal and real beauty in the context of Plato’s educational philosophy.

In the opening scene of Book VII of Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates instructs Glaucon about the process of attaining knowledge and truth using the cave metaphor. He depicts a group of convicts who have been imprisoned in a cave since childhood and can only see the shadows cast on the wall, which they interpret as the entirety of reality. When one prisoner is released and gradually acclimates to the light outside the cave, he begins to glimpse the true world and realizes that the shadows were only hazy representations of reality. Plato employs this metaphor to demonstrate his teaching method: individuals can learn abstract things through tangible imagery. By comparing the deity of love to a mathematician, Aschenbach is given an educated role akin to Glaucon.

Tadzio’s physical beauty is perceived by Aschenbach as a projection of the god of love, and it serves as a tool for Aschenbach in his pursuit of spiritual beauty. This allows him to recognize the abstract spiritual beauty concealed beneath the physical form of a lovely young child. Aschenbach’s longing for Tadzio might thus be understood as an artistic quest for ideal beauty.

Similarly, Plato uses this concept of obtaining abstract knowledge through concrete objects in his discussions of love and beauty in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. This is especially clear in the theory of the *Ladder of Love*, which I shall discuss further in the following paragraph.

Plato's intellectual perspectives in these conversations are mirrored in *Death in Venice*.

2.4. The Eternal Beauty of Youth in Tadzio

In addition to capturing the beauty of sculpture, the eternity of Tadzio's physical beauty is also reflected in the undying beauty of his youth. When describing Tadzio's marble statue-like pure beauty, Aschenbach also verifies, "the boy's fair, blossoming head in its consummate charm, the head of an Eros"(Mann, 2005:52). As previously cited, Eros uses Tadzio's body to help Aschenbach comprehend spiritual beauty. In Greek mythology, Eros, as the child of the goddess of beauty, is sometimes depicted as an innocent child and at other times as a handsome youth. In classical sculpture, Eros's image never ages; his muscular physique, flawless face, and lively actions display the youthful beauty full of vitality typical of young males, a trait that fades with age in mortals. The permanent youth is a privilege of immortals.

The emphasis on the beauty of youth is not only evident in descriptions of Tadzio's appearance but also subtly mentioned in a description of nature:

But a wind would waft in, a sprightly herald from abodes inaccessible to man, to say that Eos was rising from her husband's side, and then came that first sweet blush of the remotest stretches of sky and sea, presaging the Creation's reappearance to the senses. It was the goddess approaching, the seductress of youths, who had carried off Cleitus and Cephalus and, defying the envy of all Olympus, enjoyed the love of the beautiful Orion. (Mann, 2005:90)

In this passage, the images of Eros, the god of eternal youth, alongside the goddess of morning dawn, Eos, evoke associations with the tragic tales involving Eos and her beautiful young lovers. These names mentioned in the narrative refer to the mythological youths who suffered due to Eos' pursuit. In Greek myth, Eos, in her love for the mortal Tithonus, asked Zeus to grant her lover eternal life so that he could forever share the sweetness of love with her. She requested not only immortality for Tithonus but also allow him to act as a normal human being. Zeus granted her request but did not bestow eternal youth upon him. Eos could only watch as her beloved gradually aged, forever bearing the pain of an aging body. Eventually, as Tithonus continued to age and shrink, he was transformed into a cicada. This reminds us of the story of the cicadas mentioned by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, also involving a transformation. According to the myth, cicadas were once humans who became so enchanted by the Muses that they sang

continuously, forgetting to eat and drink, and eventually died of hunger. They were transformed into cicadas by the Muses, who granted them the ability to live without food or drink, singing incessantly until their death. After death, they would go to the Muses and report on the reverence humans had shown towards them. This myth evokes the image of poets who, lost in their pursuit of art and inspiration, devote themselves entirely to their craft. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 258-259d) Aschenbach, just like the *cicadas* in the story, spends his life in the pursuit of beauty, rather than living a life of idleness.

Through the myth of Eos, the author illustrates the transient and precious beauty of youth. Eos's plea for Tithonus's endless life came at the cost of his youth, condemning him to an ugly and undying existence.

In contrast, Aschenbach hopes for Tadzio's early death: "He is very frail, he is sickly, thought Aschenbach. He'll probably not live long. And he made no attempt to account for why he felt satisfied or consoled at the thought." (Mann, 2005:62) seeking to grant this fleeting beauty of youth a form of permanence through death.

In Tadzio, Aschenbach experiences a youthfulness that he, as an older man, lacks and is profoundly attracted to this distinctive beauty. He observes Tadzio playing on the beach:

Back he came, running through the waves, his legs beating the resistant water into foam, his head flung back, and to see so vibrant a figure, with the grace and austerity of early manhood, locks dripping, fair as a gentle god, emerging from the depths of sea and sky, escaping the watery element—it was enough to inspire mythical associations, like the lay of a bard about times primeval, about the origin of form and the birth of the gods. (Mann, 2005:60)

To Aschenbach, Tadzio appears almost as an incarnation of a deity being born and the rhetoric here reminds us of the myth of Venus being born from the sea. Aschenbach is deeply moved by the boy's almost mythological youthful beauty, compelling him to evaluate his own visage, worn by the years:

(...) [he] spent long hours several times a day at his toilet, coming to table bedizened, excited, and tense. Gazing at the sweet youth who had won his heart he was sickened by his aging body: the sight of his gray hair, his pinched features filled him with shame and despair. (Mann, 2005:130)

2.5. Aschenbach's Tragic and the Topos of Hamartia

The stark contrast between Aschenbach's aging appearance and Tadzio's vibrant youth not only awakens the old artist's creative desires but also leads him down an irreversible path of error. Aschenbach's error connects him to the iconic heroes of classical tragedy. To explore his heroic qualities, it is necessary first to establish the concepts of Greek tragedy and tragic heroes from Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Aristotle emphasizes the significance of the storyline in tragedy. To obtain the best tragic effect, the narrative must adhere to the following principles:

We are left, then, with the person in between: a man not outstanding in virtue or justice, brought down through vice or depravity, who falls into adversity not through vice or depravity but because he errs in some way. He is a personage enjoying renown and prosperity, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and eminent persons from families of that kind. (...) The cause of the change will not be depravity, but a serious error on the part of a character such as we have described (or someone better rather than worse). (Aristotle, 2012:10-25)

According to Bruno D'Ambros's article "A Noção de Sujeito na Lírica e na Tragédia grega antiga e o nascimento do pensamento ocidental":

O herói não é mais um modelo incontestável, como na epopeia, mas se torna um problema porque o herói, em sua ânsia de ser o melhor, o mais virtuoso, acaba por incorrer no excesso, na desmedida, no deslimite, naquilo que a tragédia chama de *hybris*. [The hero is no longer an indisputable model, as in the epic, but becomes a problem because the hero, in his eagerness to be the best and most virtuous, ends up incurring excess, imbalance, and limits, which tragedy calls *hubris*.] (D'Ambros, 2015: 7)

His *hubris* — his constant quest of creative perfection and desire to portray the ideal beauty of an imaginary world—is Aschenbach's *hamartia*, or fatal fault. "To bring beauty into the realm of the intellect (...)" Despite having received significant social recognition, Aschenbach remains committed to become a greater, even immortal, artist. In "Contemporary Icarus: Gustav von Aschenbach's Journey towards the Sun," Anna Sieradzan points out Aschenbach's "ascending": "Aschenbach's whole soul, from the very beginning, was bent on fame," "This was he who had put knowledge underfoot to climb so high; who had outgrown the ironic pose and adjusted himself to the burdens and obligations of fame." (Sieradzan, 2020:149) This reveals that, like Icarus, Aschenbach wanted to attain something abstract and beyond human

limitations, which eventually led to his demise. His lifelong pursuit of knowledge and respect, as well as his ongoing climb toward symbolic beauty, are reminiscent of Icarus' desire to fly closer to the sun. His activities are a violation of human bounds. Aschenbach's hubris, or his insatiable quest of beauty, gradually transforms into overwhelming passion, resulting in his terrible death.

2.6. The Pursuit Led by Desire and the Duality of Beauty

Aschenbach's desire for Tadzio, a personification of pure beauty, gradually inflates, ultimately becoming a cage that imprisons him. When the old artist, as a spectator of beauty, and the observed subject, Tadzio, finally come face-to-face, Aschenbach sees,

(...) Tadzio smiled, smiled at him, with an effusive, intimate, charming, unabashed smile, his lips opening slowly. It was the smile of Narcissus bending over the water mirror, the deep, enchanted, protracted smile with which he stretched out his arms to the reflection of his own beauty, an ever so slightly contorted smile—contorted by the hopelessness of his endeavor to kiss the lovely lips of his shadow—and coquettish, inquisitive and mildly pained, beguiled and beguiling. (Mann,2005:95)

The narrator's comparison of Tadzio's smile to that of Narcissus brings about a significant story within the mythological context. In the myth, the young Narcissus, celebrated for his handsome features, is pursued by the nymph Echo. After rejecting her, he is cursed to fall in love with his own reflection in the water, leading to his eventual demise by the pool, pining away for an unattainable love.

Narcissus symbolizes not only the self-obsessed but also someone consumed by a deceptive illusion. At this juncture, Tadzio, as the object, transforms into a mirror, reflecting the natural, youthful passion absent in Aschenbach's own life. Aschenbach desires to "bear its beauty to the realm of the intellect"(Mann,2005:85) seeking to complete the missing piece of his artistic perfection.

His previous mode of creation categorizes him within Schiller's concept of the sentimental artist, just as Mann himself mentioned when comparing Achenbach with Schiller: "on the strength of the work's rigorous logic and eloquent use of antitheses, alongside Schiller and his meditation 'On Naive and Sentimental Poetry'". (Mann, 2005:11-12)

In Horst S. Daemmrich's article "Friedrich Schiller and Thomas Mann: Parallels in Aesthetics", he points out that:

It is no coincidence that the figure of the artist assumes such importance in Schiller's and Mann's works. Both believed that the increasing specialization in the various fields of knowledge which accompanied the cultural development in Western civilization had led to a situation in which the artist alone can through his works convey a semblance of order to man living in a fragmented and often chaotic world. (Daemmrich, 1965:246)

Also, he summarizes Schiller's view *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung)* as follows:

When the reflective artist observes a subject for artistic representation, he undergoes a psychological process of analyzing critically the effect of the subject on his mind and immediately relating, as well as comparing, it to an ideal. (Daemmrich, 1965:228)

Aschenbach, who maintains a critical stance toward his artistic work and judges his thoughts by moral standards, continues to pursue a higher artistic goal even after attaining much acclaim, an ideal he has yet to realize.

Schiller discussed that the sentimental artist is not satisfied with merely imitating reality but strives to depict an infinite ideal, which he can only approach but never fully realize (Daemmrich, 1965:228). This ideal, which preexists theoretically, is projected onto Tadzio when Aschenbach encounters him. Aschenbach sees Tadzio's beauty as a tangible representation of the harmonious ideal beauty he has long sought, an ideal that is detached from reality and ultimately unattainable.

Aschenbach's desire to possess this beauty is similar to Narcissus's plight: he can only approach this ideal but never truly touch it. Gradually, Tadzio is no longer merely a mirror reflecting the artistic ideals that Aschenbach pursues; instead, under the overwhelming influence of Aschenbach's internal will, Tadzio becomes an illusion of beauty, much like the reflection that held Narcissus captive by the pool, binding Aschenbach to Tadzio's side. Ultimately, only death can free him from the self-woven cage of beauty. Through Aschenbach's moral decline, the author reveals the duality of beauty—its ethical and unethical dimensions.

Tadzio becomes the figure of spiritual beauty for Aschenbach, injecting new vitality into his art and leading him from his previously rigid and strict style to a more passionate, poetic, and sensual method of creation. Simultaneously, Aschenbach is seduced by a physical beauty that, “was more beautiful than words can convey, [...] that language can only praise physical beauty, not reproduce it.”(Mann,2005:95) Aschenbach’s pursuit is motivated by desire rather than mere attraction to beauty. His story depicts the struggle and evolution of an artist torn between reason and desire. Tadzio, as a beauty symbol, becomes the *embodiment of spiritual beauty* for Aschenbach. Tadzio, being an observed object, does not have agency. Aschenbach’s unethical deeds are motivated by an overwhelming urge, which is fueled by his vision of beauty.

Aschenbach’s artistic perspective shifts dramatically, as evidenced by his fascination with Tadzio. Tadzio’s beauty injects new vitality into Aschenbach’s artistic production, transforming it from a rigorous and precise form to one that is overflowing with passion and lyrical sense. However, this transition reveals the dual character of beauty, both moral and immoral. Through Aschenbach’s pursuit led by desire, the author highlights this duality and the conflict between reason and desire.

Captured by Tadzio’s ideal beauty, Aschenbach progressively abandons his rationality and artistic dignity. He turns from an artist who values reason to someone who obsesses over the physical, bodily beauty he can touch in actuality. This beauty, which cannot be defined by words, sends him into a spiral of extravagant longing, eventually leading him away from his rigorous lifestyle and artistic creativity.

Given that the pursuit of beauty is both sweet and fraught with danger, should artists abandon their artistic ideals for self-preservation? Evidently, the author emphasizes that “beauty is the path the man of feeling takes to the spiritual, though merely the path”(Mann, 2005:84) Through Aschenbach’s spiritually degenerate experiences, the author seems to warn all artists that the pursuit of art and beauty must adhere to moral standards, and passions should be controlled by rationality. This corresponds to Plato’s concept in the *Phaedrus*: one must use the soul to control the horse of desire, keeping the horse of reason and the horse of desire in balance, in order to allow the soul to ascend.

In the discussion about the artist’s relationship with beauty, Mann in the 5th chapter adapts from

Plato's *Phaedrus*:

For beauty, Phaedrus, mark thou well, beauty and beauty alone is at once divine and visible; it is hence the path of the man of the senses, little Phaedrus, the path of the artist to the intellect. But dost thou believe, dear boy, that the man for whom the path to the intellect leads through the senses can ever find wisdom and the true dignity of man? Or dost thou rather believe (I leave it to thee to decide) that it is a perilously alluring path, indeed, a path of sin and delusion that must needs lead one astray? For surely thou knowest that we poets cannot follow the path of beauty lest Eros should join forces with us and take the lead; yes, though heroes we may be after our fashion and chaste warriors, we are as women, for passion is our exultation and our longing must ever be love—such is our bliss and our shame. Now dost thou see that we poets can be neither wise nor dignified? That we must needs go astray, ever be... Now I shall go, Phaedrus, and thou shalt remain. And when thou seest me no more, then thou too shalt go.
(Mann, 2005:136-138)

Through the story of Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann discusses the tension between rationality and desire that artists face in their quest of beauty. Aschenbach's experiences indicate that seeking sensual beauty as a primary purpose is insufficient; artists should see beauty as a means to an end, with spiritual elevation and the development of wisdom serving as ultimate objectives. The passage shows the importance of passion in an artist's pursuit of beauty. However, Aschenbach depends exclusively on desire (passion) as the driving force behind his pursuit of artistic beauty, ignoring the function of self-restraint, which is using the power of reason to control excessive desire.

As an artist, Aschenbach fails to maintain the proper balance between reason and emotion, focusing exclusively on the sensuous experience, which leads him to cross moral lines. Knowledge is objective and impartial, whereas the quest of beauty is emotive, therefore their balance is critical. The author's Platonic conversation in the book indicates that knowledge and wisdom are essential in the pursuit of beauty, just as Aschenbach maintained his attitude toward beauty before enduring a significant transformation: His ideas glittered with passionate fire. Nonetheless, the emotions were calm and regulated.

Leaving behind knowledge and dedicating oneself completely to beauty might seem straightforward, but it can cause severe emotional turmoil, resulting in the abandoning of the rigor required for true beauty. Pursuing beauty alone can cause tremendous emotional changes, and relying exclusively on beauty to motivate life and creation is impractical. Without spiritual

elevation, one is unable to appreciate the core of beauty.

As mentioned in the first chapter, “the most beautiful symbol”(Mann, 2005:17)—Sebastian—exemplifies that true beauty is not merely physical perfection but also the beauty of the spirit that transcends the physical. The figure of Sebastian praises the noble spirit manifested in the martyred hero who exhibits persistence, self-control, and conquers sufferings.

Although the author specifically references Plato’s *Phaedrus*, it is evident that Plato’s insights on the pursuit of beauty, particularly those presented in another significant dialogue - *Symposium* also addresses the themes of love and beauty. In *Symposium*, the *Ladder of Love* described by Diotima involves progressing from the love of one individual’s physical beauty to the appreciation of all physical beauty, then ascending to the love of souls, followed by the love of laws and institutions, advancing to the love of knowledge, and finally culminating in the love of Beauty itself.

The reason for Aschenbach’s misdirection in his pursuit of beauty is apparent: he did not follow the *Ladder of Love* to elevate his pursuit to a spiritual level. Instead, he became increasingly infatuated with sensual, physical desires, inevitably distancing himself from the spiritual beauty he once desired and perceived in Tadzio. However, Aschenbach’s death is not merely an allegorical and horrific warning. In the final, Aschenbach realizes he is on the wrong path and, through Tadzio—who once again becomes Aschenbach’s Eros—displays true beauty to the dying artist. Besides Tadzio and Aschenbach, another significant character is Tadzio’s playmate, Jasiu, who is both a companion to Tadzio and “his inferior, his servant”. (Mann, 2005:81). He can be seen as one of the followers of beauty, like Aschenbach. In the novella’s last chapter, the dying Aschenbach recognizes, through Tadzio’s conflict with this servant of beauty, that the beauty he has been pursuing and hopes to attain through a connection with Tadzio is merely one of the projections of beauty itself in reality:

That stocky fellow with the belted linen suit and black, slicked-down hair— the one they addressed as Jasiu—aroused and blinded by a handful of sand thrown in his face, had forced Tadzio into a wrestling match, which ended in the swift defeat of the beautiful yet weaker boy. (...) There he stood a moment, gazing out into the distance, then turned to the left and began moving slowly along the long, narrow strip of exposed land. Separated from the shore by a broad stretch of water and from his companions by a proud frame of mind, he walked on, a highly aloof and isolated figure, his hair streaming, in the sea, in the wind, before the misty infinitude. Again he paused to gaze into the distance. And all at once, as if driven by a

memory, an impulse, he twisted his body at the waist, hand on hip, into a graceful turn and glanced over his shoulder towards the shore. (Mann, 2005: 139-141)

In the conflict between Tadzio and Jasiu, Aschenbach once again sees the fragility of the beauty (previously, Aschenbach thought Tadzio's frail health indicated he would die young). As his own life hangs by a thread, Aschenbach struggles to protect this delicate physical beauty. However, when Jasiu lets go of Tadzio, the boy walks toward the sea as if nothing happened, continuing to display his beauty. Aschenbach sees the vulnerability of physical beauty, which deepens his desire to protect the ephemeral beauty. In this symbolic scene, Aschenbach ultimately understands that he will never possess the ideal beauty. Even though the pursuers of beauty might try to harm it, they can only affect its manifestations, not the abstract concept of beauty itself. The essence of beauty is eternally existent and constant; it does not lose its intrinsic beauty due to others' pursuit or destruction of its external form. Beauty does not belong to one person or thing but exists independently, free from profane acquisitiveness.

At the novella's end, Aschenbach does not die in agony. Although his diminishing vitality restricts his actions, it ignites his perception of beauty beyond the physical. Eventually he recognized the nature of beauty. Tadzio becomes the wings of his soul, guiding it toward "the promising immensity of it all". (Mann, 2005: 142) Here he implies Plato's idea in *Phaedrus* that "(...) at the end of their lives, when they leave their bodies, they may not have any wings, but they do have the desire to gain them (...)"(Plato, 2002: 256d)

2.7. The Topos of Immortality in Aschenbach's Tragic End

Aschenbach's fate in *Death in Venice* is significant not only from an aesthetic perspective, but also as a reflection of the author's artistic interpretation of the *topos* of immortality. Although Tadzio is a physical person, he subsequently represents the timeless beauty found in the domain of the soul, which the artist seeks. Thus, being a mortal, Aschenbach is unable to reach out and touch Tadzio, symbolizing his incapacity to grasp the pure ideal of beauty that Tadzio represents.

Throughout his life, Aschenbach sought creative elevation, with honor as the ultimate goal of his artistic pursuits. "Yet he eventually gained the dignity to which, as he maintained, every great talent feels instinctively drawn. One might even say that his entire development consisted

in jettisoning the constraints of doubt and irony and making the conscious, defiant ascent to dignity.”(Mann, T., 2005:18)

This final, glorious death—a great artist’s death—liberates him from the restrictions of the physical, providing him spiritual immortality: “a respectfully stunned world received word of his death”(Mann, T., 2005:142) In ancient Greek culture, honor and death were intricately intertwined. For example, Achilles in the *Iliad* chooses a brief but great life to gain immortal fame:

My mother Thetis tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end [telos]. If I stay here and fight, I shall lose my safe homecoming [nostos] but I will have a glory [kleos] that is unwilling: whereas if I go home my glory [kleos] will die, but it will be a long time before the outcome [telos] of death shall take me. (Homer, *Iliad*, Book IX, 410-416).

Similarly, Aschenbach achieves the honor and immortality he craved in his final moments by becoming an enduring presence in the world of art. His death breathes new life into his artistic achievements, ensuring he be recognized and honored throughout history. Both artists and ancient Greeks seek eternal honor for their souls. The ancient Greek ideals of honor and death are brilliantly captured in Aschenbach’s story. His fate demonstrates that life and death are not diametrically opposed, but rather complementary; death reinforces the significance of life. The glory of existence gives death purpose, transforming it into an immortal spirit cherished by posterity.

As a result, Aschenbach’s death marks a spiritual rebirth rather than the end of his life. Death transforms him from mortal to immortal. Finally, under the guidance of Tadzio, Aschenbach’s soul is released. Death is not a religious punishment but a liberation of his soul from the decaying physical form, following the steps of spiritual beauty to ascend.

3. “Illusions of Classical Beauty” in *Forbidden Colors* of Yukio Mishima

Forbidden Colors, written between 1951 and 1953, was controversial due to its exploration of socially taboo themes and its perceived anti-traditional stance. Mishima himself described the initial draft, completed in 1950, as “unnecessarily confused.”(Scott, 2000:98) However, it also marked a pivotal transition in his literary thinking. During his subsequent trip to Greece, he realized that the modern romantic artist’s solitary stance, separated from art, which he had previously followed, had become outdated. This journey proved to be a form of therapy, “healed him of ‘my self-hatred and liking for solitude.’”(Scott, 2000, 105), being followed by the awakening of a Nietzschean perspective – “will toward power.”(Scott, 2000, 105) Upon his return to Japan, he continued to work on *Forbidden Colors*, and conceived a very different second half, which led to a maturation of his literary work.

In his novel *Forbidden Colors*, Mishima presents the story of an elderly artist, Shunsuke, who employs the services of a young man named Yuichi, described as possessing Greek physical beauty, to exact revenge on the women who had previously betrayed him. However, Shunsuke becomes infatuated with the youth himself and commits suicide. Yuichi is released from the bondage of the old man and begins a new life. Mishima has claimed that the two main characters represent “the discrepancies and conflicts within myself, as represented by two ‘I’s.’”(Scott, 2000, 100) Through the complex plot of the novel, the inner thoughts of the characters and their dialogues, Mishima tries to discuss in depth the relationship between artists and art, with an emphasis on the aesthetic issues related to the body and the spirit. Despite both Mishima and Mann being influenced by classical aesthetics rooted in ancient Greek traditions, they advance disparate perspectives on the pursuit of beauty by artists.

In order to more accurately assess the relationship between *Forbidden Colors* and *Death in Venice*, it is first necessary to identify the similarities between the two works. They both exhibit a notable degree of similarity with regard to their characters and plot. In both cases, the narrative revolves around an elderly artist who is experiencing a quest for beautiful youth.

Both Shunsuke and Aschenbach are socially renowned writers who have achieved a certain level of success in their artistic careers. Additionally, both exhibit the outward signs of fatigue and aging that often accompany a life dedicated to the arts. Shunsuke’s appearance is depicted in the following terms: “In every feature the traces of long, hard work and of spirit lay open to

the light. His face, however, was not so much molded by spirit as riddled with it.”(Mishima, 1968, 5) Aschenbach’s description reads: “Important destinies must have passed through that head, which was often tilted dolefully, yet it was art—not, as is commonly the case, a hard and turbulent life—that had formed the physiognomy.”(Mann, 2004, 23)

Both writers pursued a rigorous and ascetic lifestyle of self-discipline in order to devote themselves fully to the sake of art. Aschenbach “would start his day early by dashing cold water over his chest and back”(Mann, 2004, 15); Shunsuke “work there until three or four in the morning (...) He kept to this routine rigidly. From the previous night until about ten in the morning he never saw his wife.”(Mishima, 1968, 9) In his travel, Shunsuke encounters the handsome young man Yuichi. The scene in which Yuichi is likened to a bronze statue of Apollo in the sea and endowed with a quality of divinity, evokes the image of Tadzio similarly engaged in play in the sea:

As it reached the shallows and seemed about to break, suddenly in the middle of the wave a swimmer stood out. (...) It was an amazingly beautiful young man. His body surpassed the sculptures of ancient Greece. It was like the Apollo molded in bronze by an artist of the Peloponnesus school.(Mishima, 1968, 19)

In their pursuit and fixation on the aesthetic appeal of the idealized young males, both writers derived new artistic inspirations and produced more impassioned works that diverged from their previous creations, effectively resolving their creative quandaries. In the end, both writers’ quest for the idealized male figures concluded with their own demise.

Both works reflect on Plato’s contemplation regarding the topics of lover and beloved. In the *Symposium*, Plato, through the voice of the priestess Diotima, discusses the nature of love, mentioning in 204c that “the lovable, indeed, is the truly beautiful, tender, perfect, and heaven-blest; but the lover is of a different type.”(Plato, 1925, 204c) Additionally, based on Socrates’ speech, love is directed towards certain things, making the lover a suitor, not the beloved. In *Death in Venice*, the discussion from the *Symposium* is combined with the setting of the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates’ teachings to *Phaedrus* introduce reflections on love and beauty. The lover is considered more sacred than the beloved because divinity resides with the lover, not with the beloved.(Mann, 2004:84) Mishima develops this topic further through the words of Yuichi’s friend, Jackie: “Those who love are always magnanimous; those who are loved are the cruel ones. (...) What makes a man cruel is the consciousness that he is loved.”(Mishima,

1968, 261). This emphasizes the attitude of the beloved towards the lover, suggesting that the beloved does not reciprocate the lover's love, making their love one-directional. This transforms the beloved from a passive receiver to an active responder, highlighting the beloved's central role in the dynamics of love.

3.1. Natural and Artificial Beauty

As previously stated, in *Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann calls for a return to the concept of natural beauty pursued by the ancient Greeks. This is achieved through a detailed portrayal of the Venetian seaside and the elevation of the natural landscape observed by Aschenbach.

Similarly, Mishima provides an analysis of the theme of natural beauty in classical aesthetics through an examination of the natural environment. He identifies an "extreme artificiality of their skillful copying of nature"(Mishima, 1968, 158) in the natural scenery of Japanese gardens, which prompts him to reflect on the relationship between nature and art, and to articulate his own perspectives in a more intuitive way:

[I]n the extreme artificiality of their skillful copying of nature, they attempted to betray nature. Between nature and the work of art, there is a secret rebellion brewing. The revolt of the work of art against nature is like the intellectual defilement of a woman who gives her body away."(Mishima, 1968, 158)

The author believes that the imitation of nature is a transgression against nature itself. The human imposition of spirit on nature disrupts its pure material beauty. In artistic works, the more an artist tries to replicate nature, the more evident the artificial traces become. This imposition can even constrain nature, thereby distorting its inherent beauty:

These famous old gardens are fastened by the cord of a passion for the invisibly faithless female known as the work of art. They are men who have forgotten their basic warlike mission. We look at them and see alliances of never-ending despair, marital lives filled with fatigue.(Mishima, 1968, 158)

The author is not only discussing the relationship between art and nature but also guiding us toward the conflict between the natural body and the artificial spirit. The discussion of body and spirit is one of the crucial themes the author aims to explore through this novel.

3.2. Spiritual and Physical Beauty

3.2.1. Erotic Reproduction of Love

Based on the previous discussion, we can clearly see that Aschenbach's relationship with Tadzio, as well as Shunsuke's relationship with Yuichi, reflects the dynamics of lover and beloved. What connects these older writers with the beautiful youths is love/eros, which is also the central theme explored by Plato in the *Symposium*. According to Marina Berzins McCoy:

Diotima does not view eros as being about the qualities of a beloved alone, or of a lover alone, or even simply the relationship between lover and beloved. Rather, central to a love relationship is the lover, the beloved, their relationship, and the creative activity that stems from their eros for one another. After all, Diotima's speech is not primarily an account of Beauty, but rather an account of eros. (...) Rather, the focus of her speech is to convey what it means to love.”(McCoy, 2013: 121)

Diotima posits that love is innately driven by a desire for that which one lacks, manifesting as an inexorable pursuit of “beautiful things”: “(...) he loves what he lacks and has not”.(Plato, 1925, 201b) In both *Forbidden Colors* and *Death in Venice*, the older writers lack youth and beauty and thus pursue the beauty of youthful bodies. This pursuit leads to the development of love, which causes a change in their attitudes. Aschenbach transitions from admiration to infatuation and subsequently recognizes his feelings for Tadzio as love, while Shunsuke moves from jealousy to eventually falling in love with the beautiful youth Yuichi.

Both writers produce passionate works, different from their previous ones, as a result of the erotic reproduction caused by this intense love. Shunsuke, like Aschenbach, experiences for the first time the poetic creative passion brought by love and desire. McCoy concludes that:

Diotima's speech refers to six kinds of erotic reproduction in the following order: (1) the begetting of Eros himself by Poros and Penia (203a–e); (2) the way in which any genesis in the arts is a kind of ποιησις [making] in the arts (205b–e); (3) giving birth to physical children for the sake of immortality (207b–208b); (4) giving birth to noble acts, even to the point of death, for the sake of glory, as in Achilles' sacrifice (208c–208e); (5) giving birth to practical wisdom and excellence, particularly in the right ordering of cities and households (208e–209a); and (6) giving birth to discourses (λόγοι) (210d). (McCoy, 2013: 122)

Aschenbach, captivated by the young Tadzio, weaves his literary art to capture the boy's beauty, allowing it to contaminate his work—an interesting parallel to the contagious disease

threatening them all:

What is more, he longed to work in Tadzio's presence, to model his writing on the boy's physique, to let his style follow the lines of that body, which he saw as godlike, (...) Never had he experienced the pleasure of the word to be sweeter, never had he known with such certitude that Eros is in the word than during those dangerously delightful hours when, seated at his rough table under the awning, in full view of his idol, the music of his voice in his ears, he formulated that little essay—a page and a half of sublime prose based on Tadzio's beauty—the purity, nobility, and quivering emotional tension of which would soon win the admiration of many. (Mann, 2004: 85-86)

Aschenbach's creative process, mimicking the method of copying artistic material, parallels the sculptor's process of creating a statue. At this moment, Tadzio is to Aschenbach what the mythical Galatea was to Pygmalion.

Pygmalion, a sculptor from Cyprus, carved a perfect, ivory statue of a woman and fell deeply in love with her. He treated her as his ideal and adorned her carefully. His love made his wish come true; Aphrodite, moved by his sincere affection, granted the statue a soul and life. The tale of Pygmalion has served as a paradigm, demonstrating the significant aesthetic concept of an artist's desire to create through art a perfect form that no living person possesses.

In *Forbidden Colors*, the implication of Pygmalion recurs with frequency. Shunsuke often emphasizes that his relationship with Yuichi is akin to that of a writer and his material. Just as the artist Pygmalion fell in love with the statue that served as his material, Shunsuke's love for Yuichi mirrors this dynamic: "Shunsuke had used Yuichi as the material of a work he dreamed of."(Mishima, 1968,278)

Pygmalion, as the first artist to bestow life upon his creation, is a sample of sincere love for the ideal artistic material. The myth of Pygmalion reveals an essential objective of classical art: the "imitation of nature," aligning perfectly with what Shunsuke believes to be the ultimate goal pursued by artists: "Thus the supreme objective of spirit (...) the creation of nature."(Mishima, 1968, 338)

Through the character of Shunsuke, Mishima expresses his thoughts on artistic creation. The relationship between the artist and the material essentially mirrors the relationship between spirit and body. The artist's love for the subject of creation is the spirit's attempt to restore the

beauty of the body, which serves as the driving motivation behind the imitation of nature in art.

As Diotima explains: “A man (...) as he contemplates essential beauty. This, when once beheld, (...) ready to do without either food or drink if that were any way possible, and only gaze upon them and have their company.”(Plato, *Sym.* 211d) It’s in Shunsuke’s behavior that it shows: “Yuichi’s existence (...) never left the thoughts of the writer. It had got so that a day that went by when he didn’t hear that clear, youthful voice, if only over the phone, was an unhappy, cloudy day.”(Mishima, 1968, 119) Influenced by this intense desire and driven by his unrequited love for Yuichi, he overcomes his previous limitation and creates romantic novels with misery and tragic ends:

Shunsuke’s creative powers were returning to life, like the reviving flowers. He had written two or three fragmentary books brimming with a mysterious energy. They were recrudescences of the time of the *Taiheiki*, novels filled with arabesques like the display of decapitated heads, or the burning of monasteries, or the revelation of the child of the Hannya Temple, or the love affair of the Great Priest of the Shiga Daitoku Temple and the Great Imperial Concubine of Kyogoku. They also turned to the ancient world of the Kagura songs, and touched upon the heartbreak of the man who must relinquish the boy wearing the hairlock of childhood. The long occasional piece named “Even a Spring Day,” patterned after the “Ionian melancholy” of ancient Greece, had behind it also the paradoxical influence of an actual society like that of the “plague-infested meads” of Empedocles. (Mishima, 1968, 208-209)

Shunsuke’s artistic resurgence is fueled by his intense desire and love for Yuichi, driving him to create works deeply rooted in both historical Japanese and ancient Greek influences. This blend of cultural elements results in reflective and darkly poetic narratives.

3.2.2. Youth and Rebirth

In his youth, Shunsuke had a strong desire to pursue the ideal of perfect youth. Due to his physical ugliness, he sought beauty in the realm of the spirit to compensate for his shortcomings. This led him to devote himself to literary creation. Although he is now renowned, he does not acknowledge the compliments from critics regarding his appearance, believing that “the characteristics of spiritual beauty” are insufficient to conceal his physical ugliness. Mishima presents a critical view of a group that, influenced by intellectual hedonism, has separated beauty from ethics, prioritizing individualism and personal aesthetics over universal moral values. This introduces an exploration of the conflict between beauty and morality, a theme I

will expand upon later:

Shunsuke's features were termed beautiful by that admirable group which, having been poisoned by the intellectual hedonism of the times, having replaced concern for humanity with individualism, having extirpated universality from the sense of beauty, had larcenously and violently tom beauty from the arms of ethics.(Mishima, 1968, 6)

His physical flaw led to failed marriages, intensifying his jealousy of youth and beauty and his hatred for his own ugly youth. He envies those with the youthful bodies he never possessed: "He had had more rivals than he had fingers, and their youthful arrogance, their hateful good looks (...)"(Mishima, 1968, 14)

Until the moment he first saw Yuichi, who possessed perfect physical beauty, he felt a surge of desire for revenge against beauty. However, he was later overwhelmed by his beauty: "So much of my life has been spent fighting against beauty; but the time is approaching that beauty and I should shake hands in reconciliation"(Mishima, 1968, 21). The part of him that hated beauty had died, and his past life, along with his current self, seemed as lifeless as a corpse. Just as Aschenbach saw Tadzio and became aware of his own aging, Shunsuke realized through Yuichi's youth that his own youth had faded. His struggle against beauty had lost its meaning:

Shunsuke knew what he was doing, for when he saw Yuichi he decided to crawl, very much alive, into his coffin. When he was involved in creation the world seemed clear, and men's affairs transparent, because in such moments he was undoubtedly dead. (Mishima, 1968:67)

In his interactions with Yuichi, Shunsuke discovered an opportunity for "rebirth", willing to prolong his own life through Yuichi:

As he did in his works, he was taking Yuichi's body and populating it with his spirit, and with it he had decided to cure all his gloomy jealousies and grudges. He sought perfect rehabilitation. In short, he wished to be reborn in the world as a corpse. (Mishima, 1968, 67)

He sought to fulfill his youthful dreams: previously believing in the opposition between spirit and body, Shunsuke began to explore the possibility of uniting them through Yuichi. He aimed to create a united form that embodies both spiritual and physical beauty. As a result of his sustained engagement with Yuichi, Shunsuke began to have an impulse similar to those of

Aschenbach toward Tadzio. In Yuichi, he also sees the irreversible fading of youthful vigor and develops a wish to preserve youth, like the sunset, that shows the world the most beautiful moments before it fades away: “To cure diseases of life he would impart the steely health of death.”(Mishima, 1968, 118)

3.2.3. The Artist’s Relationship with Beauty

Forbidden Colors is not limited to erotic depictions of sex and lust but elevates the discussions to an aesthetic level. When describing the appearance of the beautiful youth, the author emphasizes his Greek statuesque beauty, introducing his reflections on Greek aesthetics through the physical beauty of Yuichi. Yuichi’s image seems to be reminiscent of the statue-like beautiful youth Tadzio, and for the older writer, Yuichi also embodies the ideal of beauty. However, unlike Tadzio, in describing Yuichi’s physical beauty in terms of a statue, there is a shift in the author’s preference for materials. We attempt to understand this change, as revealed in his travelogue *The Cup of Apollo* (1952), to further grasp Mishima’s deeper understanding of Greek aesthetics and how he developed his own aesthetic view.

The Cup of Apollo is Mishima’s account of his travels to Americas and Europe from 1952 to 1953, passing through Athens, Delphi, Rome, and other places. The journey took place between the two parts of *Forbidden Colors*. In this travelogue, Mishima combines his observations with his emotional experiences, expressing his reflections. Some of the views expressed also coincide with the aesthetic ideas in the second half of this novel.

As previously mentioned, the author compares Yuichi to a bronze statue from the Peloponnesian school when he first appears:

It overflowed with gentle beauty and carried such a noble column of a neck, such gently sloping shoulders, such a softly broad chest, such elegantly rounded wrists, such a rapidly tapering tightly filled trunk, such legs, stoutly filled out like a heroic sword.(Mishima, 1968, 19)

He projects his imagination of Apollo’s bronze statue onto Yuichi, and it is with this “illusion of beauty” that he embarks on his journey to foreign lands.

Mishima named his travelogue *The Cup of Apollo*, highlighting that Apollo’s image was central

to his journey. However, at the Temple of Delphi, he did not find a statue of Apollo. It wasn't until he visited the Delphi Archaeological Museum that he saw the bronze charioteer statue, which he believed had a face even more beautiful than Apollo's. This real-life statue overlapped with and eventually surpassed his imagined vision, leading him to believe that the reality of art far exceeds the imagined *illusion* of spiritual art because it captures the pinnacle of youthful physical beauty:

馭者像の頭部は、その後の大理石彫刻の頭部とちがった獨創性をもち、いかなる神にも似ない人間の若者の素朴な青春を表現してる。私はこの顔をアポロよりもさらに美しいと思ふ。そこには神格を匂はすやうなものは何一つなく、倨傲の代りに羞らひが、好色の代りに純潔が香りを放つてゐる。勝利者の羞らひ、輝やくやうな純潔、かういふものの眞實の表現は、何とわれくの心を奥底からゆすぶることであらう。藝術が深刻なあるひは暗い主題よりも、はるかに苦手とするものは、この種の主題である(Mishima, 1975, 113)

[The head of this Charioteer is more original than those of the later marble sculptures and shows the simple youth of a young man who does not resemble any god. I think his face is more beautiful than Apollo's; he has no air of godliness, and in his haughtiness and amorality there is a shyness, a purity, which is the shyness of a victor, a glorious purity. What a shock to this part of our heart to be so truly represented! As art, the expression of such themes is much more difficult than the expression of deep or dark themes.]

Mishima emphasizes the youthful vitality displayed by the well-built young men competing in the Olympic arena, symbolizing purity, innocence, and humility of youth untainted by the corruption of knowledge. Their spirit is captured in the bronze charioteer's expression, where the fusion of youthful physique and simple spirit is evident. It mirrors the ideal of "the balance of body and wisdom" that Shunsuke admires in *Forbidden Colors*. He believes that Socrates introduced the emphasis on spirit in ancient Greece, leading young men to forsake physical cultivation for spiritual enrichment, thereby separating body and spirit, thus distancing them further apart.

At the temple of Delphi, he saw another material more suited to expressing the pure beauty of the human body—marble:

犠牲の叫びは圓柱に反響し、その血は新しい白晳の大理石の上に美しく流れたにちがひない。希臘彫刻において、いつも人間の肉を表現するのに用ひられたこの石は、血潮の色と

も青空の色ともよく似合ふ。(Mishima, 1975, 114) [The blood of the victims must have flowed beautifully on the new white marble, as their cries of sacrifice echoed on the columns. This stone, always used to represent human flesh in Greek sculpture, matches well with the color of the blood and the blue sky.]

White marble, compared to bronze, represents better the whiteness and purity of human skin. In the subsequent parts, Mishima wrote after returning from his world tour, the previously used *bronze statue* metaphor for Yuichi's physical beauty was completely replaced by the figure of a marble statue.

Mishima criticized the spirit that consists solely of thought and language, arguing that beauty can only be truly experienced through the senses: "Spirit was badly corrupted in later times, exalted through the action of lustless love, and smirched through the action of lustless loathing."(Mishima, 1968, 241) He believed that capturing beauty requires a sensory foundation, thus emphasizing the importance of physical experience in the pursuit of beauty:

Beauty, on the other hand, is always on this side. It is in this world, in the present, firm; it can be touched with the hand. That our sexual appetites can taste it is beauty's precondition. Sensuality is, therefore, essential. It confirms beauty. However, beauty can never be reached, because the susceptibilities of sense, more than anything else, block attainment of it (Mishima, 1968:339)

Mishima praised the Greek method of expressing beauty through sculpture, stating, "The method by which the Greeks expressed beauty through sculpture was a wise one."(Mishima, 1968, 339) It is evident that Mishima's admiration for the physical body was deeply influenced by classical Greek sculpture. His reverence for young and beautiful bodies holds significant importance in his aesthetic pursuits, forming an essential part of his aesthetic ideas. The author not only explores the relationship between body and spirit in *Forbidden Colors* but also articulates this connection more apparently in his later representative play, *The Terrace of the Leper King* (1969). According to Scott, "Mishima used the tale to make the point that the material triumphs over the immaterial, the Body over the Spirit"(Scott, 2000, 205)

Through the statue, Mishima discovered the Greek way of balancing internal and external beauty, a view also expressed in *Forbidden Colors*: "The Greeks had the rare power to look at internal beauty as if it were hewn from marble."(Mishima, 1968, 241) Shunsuke believes that spiritual beauty is elusive, just an *illusion of beauty*, which explains his rejection of critics'

praise for his *spiritual beauty* at the novel's beginning. He realized the importance of the physical body in the artist's pursuit of beauty and recognized that while he possessed spiritual beauty, he lacked a corresponding beautiful physique. The novelist's attempt to express beauty through words lacks essential sensuality, as the spirit can only fully express beauty through physical experience.

3.3. Pursuit of Beauty and Immortality

In the final chapter of the novel, the author places Shunsuke and Yuichi in a teaching scene reminiscent of Socrates with a beautiful youth, using a Socratic questioning educational method to elucidate the relationship between spirit and body:

Socrates listened to the cicada's voice and in the morning by the little stream lectured to the beautiful boy Phaedrus. Socrates asked questions and answered them himself. He discovered the roundabout method of arriving at truth through questioning. But you'll never get a question from absolute beauty in a natural body. Questions and answers can only be exchanged between things in the same category. Spirit and body can never engage in dialogue. (Mishima, 1968, 338)

The old artist represents the ugly spirit, while the young Yuichi embodies the beautiful body/nature. The spirit's pursuit of nature is a form of love for what it lacks. Because of its love for nature, the spirit perpetually strives toward the unattainable goal of creating nature. Shunsuke believes "love—at least my love—doesn't have even the hope of Socrates' love. Love is born from nothing less than hopelessness." (Mishima, 1968, 338). He realizes that due to his aging, he can no longer possess a youthful body. His love for Yuichi's young body reflects his desire for the ideal beauty of nature.

He further emphasized the importance of *senses* in perceiving beauty, as mentioned earlier. He also proposed that the concept of beauty is "the nature under man's nature, under man's condition." (Mishima, 1968, 339) For novelists and artists, the senses are their medium to achieve true beauty.

Additionally, Shunsuke believes that death stems from the pursuit of beauty. He wishes to possess a young and beautiful body before completing the final self-sacrifice of death. Otherwise, his death would merely be a mundane end, failing to reach the realm of beauty he

pursues. Shunsuke seeks eternal beauty, not the beauty of material existence. He believes that only through the combination of sensory experience (sensory beauty) and internal beauty can one attain the ideal beauty.

Longing for youthful beauty, Shunsuke—the old writer as a spiritual entity—encounters the beautiful youth in his search for the perfect body. However, as Shunsuke uses Yuichi as a tool for revenge, Yuichi develops a desire to become a “real existence.”(Mishima, 1968, 123) The transformation of the material of physical beauty results in failure of old artist’s plan for rebirth through the youthful body. Shunsuke, identifying himself as a witness to youth, shapes the sand falling in the hourglass of youth into an eternal marble statue of youth. After spiritually reshaping Yuichi’s youthful body, Shunsuke no longer needs Yuichi. The nature created by Shunsuke’s spirit becomes his own eternal statue of youthful beauty, representing the union of body and spirit, fulfilling the conditions for encountering beauty. Eventually, through his suicide, he reaches the aesthetic peak of life, which is the lifelong pursuit of the old artist.

A man cannot be born of his own will, but he can will to die. This was the basic proposition of all the ancient suicide philosophies. However, there can be no doubt that in death, the action known as suicide and the expression of all that is life can come simultaneously. The supreme moment must wait for death. (Mishima, 1968, 340).

Shunsuke’s aspiration to reach “beauty in the present”(Mishima, 1968, 339) requires the supreme moment brought by suicide as his final step. His pursuit of the balance between spirit and body and his philosophy of suicide reflects the author’s own thoughts, as seen in *Sun and Steel* (1968): “I cherished a romantic impulse towards death, yet at the same time I required a strictly classical body as its vehicle; (...) A powerful, tragic frame and sculpturesque muscles were indispensable in a romantically noble death.”(Mishima, 2003, 25).

Shunsuke believes that life is a disease, a process of gradual aging. Death, however, is eternal, a stable and unchanging state that does not allow for resurrection. Therefore, beauty also possesses this eternal quality. Beauty tells us that death can cure the disease of life’s decline.

Love comes from an eternal pursuit of beautiful things. Hence, the pursuit of beauty is also a quest for eternity. Diotima represents the eternal pursuit beyond the limits of individual human life. In the *Symposium*, Diotima states about humanity’s love for eternity: “We needs must

yearn for immortality no less than for good, since love loves good to be one's own forever. And hence it necessarily follows that love is of immortality.”(Plato, Sym. 207a) Love arises from the pursuit of eternity, thereby giving birth to the desire for reproduction of human beings.

The writer pursued eternal beauty in life through death. As previously mentioned, the reproduction of love is to create beautiful things, so the old artist, in his pursuit of love for the beautiful youth, created great works of art. However, Shunsuke's suicide was not just about creating beautiful things but about achieving eternal beauty itself. This is the ultimate idea of beautiful things, and through his art, he could attain spiritual immortality.

As Scott notes, the old writer Shunsuke symbolizes Mishima's fear of aging and his artistic spirit's longing for the youthful, beautiful body. (Scott, 2000, 100) As we can see, through the character Shunsuke, Mishima attempted to attach eternity to his life through death. As he said, “I want to make a poem of my life.”(Scott, 2000, 95)

Shunsuke's interpretation of the significance of artistic works reveals us the idealistic pursuit of Mishima: “Just as an ancient lotus seed will flower again when dug up and replanted, the work of art that is said to possess everlasting life can live again in the hearts of all times, all countries.”(Mishima, 1968, 118)

His artistic works and suicide made his beauty and spirit eternal. His suicide represents his pursuit of eternal beauty, aiming to preserve the beauty of body and spirit. Mishima has obtained a body with a high degree of physical perfection through fitness training. Without ending his life in suicide, his physical appearance would inevitably undergo a decline over time, rendering his life ordinary and transient. In such a case, his life would be deprived of its eternal significance, becoming finite in duration.

4. Nietzsche's Reception in Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, published in 1956, was Mishima's literary adaptation of the 1950 arson incident that shocked Japanese society, in which the monk Hayashi Yoken set fire to the Shariden (the Golden Pavilion) of Rokuonji. In the novel, Mishima portrays the life and motivations of the arsonist, Mizoguchi, from his own perspective, exploring the reasons behind his decision to burn down the temple. Although the novel can be seen as a psychological crime novel, Mishima actually transforms the story of the arsonist into a broader reflection on the problem that artist struggles with: “美といふ固定観念に追い詰められた男といふのを、ぼくはあの中で藝術家の象徴みたいなつもりで書いたんですけど” (Mishima, 1976:289) [I wrote about a man (Mizoguchi) who was trapped by stereotypes of beauty, as if he were the symbol of an artist.]

Mishima places Mizoguchi in a dilemma of beauty and uses the narrative to guide his understanding of beauty gradually. This can also be seen as an attempt to depict the artist's pursuit of ideal beauty, highlighting the internal conflict and the challenges faced in it. From a social point of view, the burning of the Golden Pavilion is a heinous crime, but, it can be interpreted as a way of expressing ultimate beauty through destruction from an aesthetic perspective.

As Andrew Rankin comments, the novel represents Mishima's “fundamental myth of beauty and destruction.” (Rankin, 2018:32), while Donald Keene refers to it as “the theme of the compulsive destruction of beauty. Mishima himself described the style as ‘Ogai plus Mann’” (Keene, 1984:1197)

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, as a representative work of Mishima's aesthetics, combines Nietzsche's philosophy with Japanese Zen culture, while also reflecting and exploring the national spiritual crisis faced by post-war Japanese society. In this novel, Mishima attempts to call for a return to traditional Japanese culture, drawing strength from it to restore the sense of national honor.

I aim to explore how Nietzsche's theory in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) informs Mishima's *The*

Temple of the Golden Pavilion, where Nietzsche's concepts are applied to interpret and understand the shifts in character dynamics and conflicts. This analysis will focus particularly on the transformation of the protagonist, Mizoguchi, and how his thoughts and actions evolve throughout the narrative.

4.1. The Influence of Nietzsche on Mishima's and Mann's Works

Nietzsche, as a renowned German philosopher and classicist, has had a profound influence on Western literature and art since his ideas emerged in the late 19th century. Both Mishima and Mann were influenced by his ideas, which are reflected in several of their works.

4.1.1. Mishima's reception of Nietzsche

During WWII, the young Mishima developed an interest in Nietzsche's works, becoming deeply captivated by *The Birth of Tragedy*. He believed that the nihilism presented there was not merely a negation of traditional values, but a fusion of creativity and destructiveness driven by "excessive energy." In the conversation with Tomio Tezuka, which is included in the Japanese translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Tomio Tezuka, he recalled:

「悲劇の誕生」の、あのエネルギーの過剰からくるニヒリズムということばが実に好きでしたね。ニヒリズムということばは一種の禁断のことばとして、われわれの世代に共感を与えたと思います。それから超人の思想というよりも、なにか人を無理やりにエキサイトさせる力、ああいうものが戦争中の我々にとっては、麻薬みたいな感じもいくらかあったんです。(Mishima, 2018:544)[I truly liked the word "nihilism", which came from the excessive energy in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The word "nihilism" had a kind of forbidden connotation and resonated with our generation. Rather than the idea of the Übermensch, it was more the kind of force that excited people against their will. For us during the war, it had something of a narcotic effect.]

Mishima used Nietzsche's concept of "anti-modern" to help him face the harshness of reality:

ぼく個人の体験で申しますと、「ウンツァイトゲメース」Unzeitgemässというニーチェのことばが非常に好きで、戦争中はウンツァイトゲメース、「反時代的」と訳されていましたか、それがもう唯一のよりどころみたいなものでした。(Mishima, 2018:544) [Speaking from my personal experience, I was very fond of Nietzsche's word "Unzeitgemäss." During the war, it was

translated as “anti-modern,” and it became my only refuge.]

This spirit of rebellion against modernity and mainstream values ran through Mishima’s subsequent literary creations, allowing his works to maintain a position in opposition to the aesthetic values revered by modern society.

Mishima not only absorbed Nietzsche’s thought on the level of a life philosophy but also transformed it into artistic practice. In his work *Excerpts from the Philosophical Diary of a Medieval Serial Killer*, he explicitly stated that the piece was “deeply Nietzschean.”:

わたくし、「ツアラトウストラ」の影響をうけて短篇を書いたことがあるんですよ。「中世に於ける一殺人常習者の遺せる哲学的日記の抜萃」という長い題ですが、それは非常にニーチズムなんです。戦争中に書いたものですけどね。あのころはいちばん「ツアラトウストラ」やニーチェ全般にかぶれていたころかもしれません。(Mishima, 2018: 544-545)
[I once wrote a short story under the influence of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It’s a long title: *Excerpts from the Philosophical Diary of a Medieval Serial Killer*, but it’s very Nietzschean. I wrote it during the war, when I was most steeped in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Nietzsche in general.]

In the work, he explored the state of the individual after transcending traditional moral concepts of good and evil, probing how one seeks self-establishment in a world of nihilism and moral collapse, much like Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* creating oneself in an era where *God is dead*, as described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

4.1.2. Thomas Mann’s Reception of Nietzsche

Thomas Mann’s reception of Nietzsche can be observed in his 1947 essay titled “Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung” [Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Our Experience]. Mann embraced Nietzsche’s ideas from an aesthetic perspective, but he believed that, although these ideas embodied a spirit of freedom, they were ultimately insufficient for addressing real societal issues. According to Mann, Nietzsche’s critique of capitalist morality was temporary and belonged within the world of art, while the moral values truly worthy of being followed and promoted were still those of humanism. Therefore, he advocated for an ironic approach to Nietzsche’s philosophy rather than a direct acceptance, as literal agreement

with Nietzsche might lead to misunderstanding. He once cautioned: “Wer Nietzsche >eigentlich< nimmt, wörtlich nimmt, wer ihm glaubt, ist verloren” [Anyone who takes Nietzsche literally, who believes him, will lose their way.] (Mann, 1947:22)

Thomas Mann also explored the tragic aspect of Nietzsche’s thought, portraying Nietzsche as a dramatic tragic hero, comparing him to Hamlet: “Es ist das tragische Mitleid mit einer überlasteten, über-beauftragten Seele, welche zum Wissen nur berufen, nicht eigentlich dazu geboren war und, wie Hamlet, daran zerbrach.”(Mann, 1947:4) [This is the tragic compassion for an overburdened, overly tasked soul, which was only called to knowledge but not truly born for it, and, like Hamlet, was shattered by it.] Mann placed emphasis on Nietzsche’s fate as a tragic figure, highlighting his suffering and rebellious spirit. He emphasized the strength Nietzsche demonstrated in enduring illness and pain, which ultimately forged his genius, providing humanity with a model of self-discipline and endurance.

Mann also recognized the will of freedom in Nietzsche, seeing it as a rebellion against the extremely rational moral values of the bourgeois era. However, Mann believed that this kind of rebellion was only temporary, limited by the times: “Die Verteidigung des Instinkts gegen Vernunft und Bewußtheit war eine zeitliche Korrektur. Die dauernde, ewig notwendige Korrektur bleibt die des Lebens durch den Geist – oder die Moral, wenn man will.”(Mann, 1947:24) [The defense of instinct against reason and consciousness was a temporary correction. The permanent, eternally necessary correction remains the correction of life through spirit—or morality, if one prefers.] He believed that if the future brought a time of peace and stability, humanity would still require morality and spirit, not the instincts advocated by Nietzsche.

Mann consistently regarded Nietzsche as a romantic thinker and aesthete. Although he admired Nietzsche’s rebellious spirit in the face of fate and the genius born from suffering, even viewing Nietzsche as a romantic, he gradually came to realize that Nietzsche’s aesthetic ideas did not conform to traditional moral standards. Mann once pointed out: “Durch Nietzsche’s Ästhetizismus, der eine rasende Verleugnung des Geistes ist zugunsten des schönen, starken und ruchlosen Lebens, die Selbstverleugnung eines Menschen also, der tief am Leben leidet.”(Mann, 1947:22) [Nietzsche’s aestheticism, which is a furious denial of the spirit in favor of a beautiful, strong, and ruthless life, is the self-denial of a person who deeply suffers from life.] Mann further reflected on Nietzsche’s aesthetics from an ethical perspective, while it is highly appealing to artists, it is also filled with danger because such aestheticism brings

“kommt etwas Uneigentliches, Unverantwortliches, Unverlässiges und Leidenschaftlich-Gespieltes in seine philosophischen Ergüsse.” (Mann, 1947:22) [something inauthentic, irresponsible, unreliable, and passionately playful into his philosophical outpourings.]

4.2. Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*

Published in 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy* was Nietzsche’s first publication in which he wrote under the influence of ancient Greek tragedy and Wagner’s music. In 1886, he published a second edition of the book, adding a new preface: *An Attempt at Self-Criticism*.

In the work, Nietzsche draws on the figures of Apollo and Dionysus to interpret the opposition between the plastic arts, and the non-plastic musical arts. However, the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts are both opposed and symbiotic: through their “continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation”(Nietzsche, 2008:19), new artistic vitality is generated, and it is through their union that ancient Greek tragedy was born.

To further differentiate, Nietzsche compares the instincts of Apollo and Dionysus to the “artistic worlds”(Nietzsche, 2008:19) of “dream and intoxication”(2008: 19). In the Apollonian dream state, individuals are immersed in “a deep inner joy”(2008: 30) derived from temporarily forgetting the troubles of real life. The Apollonian art represents “the appearance of appearances”(2008: 31), providing humans with illusory comfort through beautiful forms, helping them escape suffering temporarily. It symbolizes not only plastic forces but also embodies order and formal beauty, emphasizing the Greek ideals of “moderation”(2008: 31), requiring the maintenance of individual boundaries. The Apollonian aesthetic world is built on the “principium individuationis”, as Nietzsche describes Apollo as a “magnificent divine image of the principium individuationis.”(2008: 21)

In the “Dionysian orgies of the Greeks”(2008: 25), Nietzsche clearly distinguishes between the Dionysian music and the music traditionally associated with Apollonian art forms. The Dionysian music conveys a more intense emotional experience, bringing individuals into the intoxicated state of Dionysus, where the boundaries between individuals are dissolved, allowing them to feel the power of merging with the collective. Apollonian music, due to its structured rhythm and sense of order, is still considered by Nietzsche as a manifestation of plastic art. Drawing on Schopenhauer’s theory, Nietzsche emphasized that music is the

embodiment of the will itself. He believed that music is the core art form that expresses the spirit of Dionysus.

From music, the tragic essence of life is revealed—something that cannot be accessed through the beauty of appearances, which is the domain of Apollonian art. Only through music can one experience pleasure in tragic suffering:

it is only on the basis of the spirit of music that we can understand the joy experienced in the annihilation of the individual. For it is only in the individual examples of such an annihilation that the eternal phenomenon of Dionysian art is made clear to us, the Dionysian art which gives expression to the will in it ... omnipotence as it were behind the principium individuationis, the eternal life beyond all phenomena and in spite of all annihilation.(Nietzsche, 2008:90)

In the forces between Dionysus and Apollo, Apollo maintains the balance of life through the “principium individuationis”, but Dionysus’s destructive power continually breaks these rules. Nietzsche notes, “from time to time the high tide of the Dionysian destroyed once again all those little eddies in which the spell cast by the one-sided Apollonian ‘will’ sought to confine Hellenic culture.”(Nietzsche, 2008:58) The power of Dionysus also destroys the “principium individuationis”, dissolving the self-awareness of the individual. Nietzsche describes, “The individual, with all his limits and moderation, sank here into the self-oblivion of the Dionysian state and forgot the Apollonian principles.”(Nietzsche, 2008:31)

The Dionysian spirit reveals the inevitable pain and chaos of life, affirming life in its entirety along with its tragic nature: “excess revealed itself as the truth, and the contradiction, the bliss born of pain spoke out from the heart of nature.”(Nietzsche, 2008:31) Nietzsche compares the Dionysian person to Hamlet, noting that both “cast a true glance into the essence of things,”(Nietzsche, 2008:46) revealing that the Dionysian attitude toward life is not to evade suffering but to fully embrace life by facing it directly, understanding that actions cannot change the essence of existence. (Nietzsche, 2008:46)

4.3. The Dionysian and Apollonian Forces in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*

4.3.1. The Golden Pavilion: Apollonian Illusion

The Golden Pavilion can be considered as a symbol of the Apollonian in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Through the relationship between Mizoguchi and the pavilion, we see how the Golden Pavilion traps him in an Apollonian state.

Apollo is the god of light, bringing beauty to everything through its radiant glow. The Golden Pavilion, shining with a brilliance, evokes associations with Apollo:

Thanks to the power of memory, the various aesthetic details began to glitter one by one out of the surrounding darkness; then the glittering spread wider and wider, until gradually the entire temple had emerged before me under that strange light of time itself, which is neither day nor night. Never before had the Golden Temple showed itself to me in so perfect a form, never had I seen it glitter like this in its every detail. It was as though I had appropriated a blind man's vision. The light that emanated from the temple itself had made the building transparent (Mishima, 1959:203-204)

Mizoguchi projects the beauty of the pavilion onto every beautiful object he sees. His aesthetics becomes a reference: When an object shares a resemblance to the Golden Pavilion, *moderation* is an abstract characteristic of beauty. It seems to indicate its aesthetic qualities which represent a classical value:

I could not think of beauty as being neither small nor large, but a thing of moderation. So when I saw small, dew-drenched summer flowers that seemed to emit a vague light, they seemed to me as beautiful as the Golden Temple. Again, when the gloomy, thunder-packed clouds stood boldly on the other side of the hills, with only the edges shining in gold, their magnificence reminded me of the Golden Temple. Finally it came about that even when I saw a beautiful face, the simile would spring into my mind: 'lovely as the Golden Temple.' (Mishima, 1959:36)

This description aligns with Nietzsche's interpretation of Apollonian beauty: "He, who according to the etymological root of his name is the 'one who appears shining', the deity of light, is also master of the beautiful appearance of the inner world of the imagination."(Nietzsche, 2008:21)

As a symbol of Apollonian beauty, the Golden Pavilion for Mizoguchi is not a physical structure in reality, but the embodiment of his internalized perception of beauty, a manifestation of the idealized image in his mind: "Could beauty, I wondered, be as unbeautiful a thing as this."(Mishima, 1959:39) Mizoguchi initially perceives the real Golden Pavilion as far from beautiful, even vastly different from the perfect image in his mind. However, through the

correction of reality, the imagined Golden Pavilion becomes even more beautiful: “It seemed that what had been nurtured in my dreams had become real and could now, in turn, serve as an impulse for further dreams.”(Mishima, 1959:42) It is evident that the Golden Pavilion in Mizoguchi’s mind does not lose its brilliance due to the imperfections. The imagined Golden Pavilion represents an eternal, unchanging metaphysical beauty, untouched by the flaws of reality

The Golden Pavilion has a purifying effect, filtering the chaos, restlessness, and instability around him into frozen, stable beauty. This transformation of disorder overwhelms him, leaving him deeply shaken and unable to escape its grip:

When it came to such things as the shock of defeat or national grief, the Golden Temple was in its element; at such times it was transcendent, or at least pretended to be transcendent. Until today, the Golden Temple had not been like this. Without doubt, the fact that it had in the end escaped being burned down in an air raid and was now out of danger had served to restore its earlier expression, (...) But the Golden Temple had entirely lost such things; it had suddenly washed away its essence and now displayed a strangely empty form, the most peculiar thing was that of all the various times when the Golden Temple had shown me its beauty, this time was the most beautiful of all. (Mishima, 1959:71-72)

The illusion of the Golden Pavilion creates a serene and beautiful mirage, but in reality, it offers those who wish to escape from the cruelty of life a false sense of order. Mizoguchi is continually trapped by the illusory world of order created by the Golden Pavilion in his mind, a world detached from reality:

It was in no way strange that the surrounding noise and confusion should enter into the form of the temple’s delicate pillars, and that they should be absorbed into the whitish sky toward which the little Kukyochō and the phoenix on top of the roof reached as they soared into the air, gradually becoming thinner. This temple, by just standing there as it did, was a controlling force, a regulating force. The more that the surrounding noise increased, the more the Golden Temple—that asymmetrical, delicate structure, with the Sōsō on one side, and above it the Kukyochō, which abruptly tapered off at the top—acted like a filter that transforms muddy into clear water. The temple did not reject the merry chattering of the sight-seers, but instead filtered those sounds, so that they entered in between those permeable pillars and finally became part of the stillness and of the clarity. Thus it accomplished on earth exactly what the shadows of the motionless pond accomplished on the water. (Mishima, 1959:112)

The illusion of the Golden Pavilion conceals the tragic essence of the world, suppressing

Mizoguchi's primal impulses and preventing him from confronting reality. Instead of facing the brutality of war and the impact of Japan's defeat on society, Mizoguchi fixates on his opposition to the Golden Pavilion. He becomes absorbed in a fantasy where both he and the pavilion might be destroyed by the war, allowing him to unite with beauty through this imagined destruction. Immersed in this dreamlike sense of happiness, he experiences a strange sense of peace and comfort: "the fire which would destroy me would probably also destroy the Golden Temple. Existing as we did under the same curse, under the same ill-omened fiery destiny, the temple and I had come to inhabit worlds of the same dimension."(Mishima, 1959:57)

From the Delphic maxim "nothing in excess", it shows the reflection of Apollo's role in imposing limitations or moral restraint on his followers: "Apollo, as an ethical deity, demands of his disciple's moderation and in order to maintain it, self-knowledge."(Nietzsche, 2008:31)

Mizoguchi defines himself as ugly due to his stutter, which becomes the foundation of his sense of self. This perceived ugliness isolates him from the external world, serving as a barrier that restricts his interactions with others:

My stuttering, I need hardly say, placed an obstacle between me and the outside world. It is the first sound that I have trouble in uttering. This first sound is like a key to the door that separates my inner world from the world outside, and I have never known that key to turn smoothly in its lock. Most people, thanks to their easy command of words, can keep this door between the inner world and the outer world wide open, so that the air passes freely between the two; but for me this has been quite impossible. Thick rust has gathered on the key. (Mishima, 1959:22)

Mizoguchi's perception of his own ugliness is the *self-knowledge* of his limitations:

At the thought that beauty should already have come into this world unknown to me, I could not help feeling a certain uneasiness and irritation. If beauty really did exist there, it meant that my own existence was a thing estranged from beauty. (Mishima, 1959:35-36)

Mizoguchi firmly believes that, as an ugly being, he cannot come into contact with beauty. This belief reflects the Apollonian attitude he upholds and his adherence to the principle of moderation.

Thus, even when he encounters beauty in the external world, his inner self remains unable to break through this boundary, preventing him from forming a deep connection to beauty. He believes that, as someone defined by ugliness, fully embracing beauty would be an excessive act, a transgression of his personal limits.

Each time Mizoguchi attempts to engage in sexual acts with beautiful women, the vision of the Golden Pavilion arises to stop him, preventing him from breaking through his own boundaries:

Inasmuch as the girl had been rejected by the Golden Temple, my efforts at finding life, too, were rejected. How could I possibly stretch out my hands towards life when I was being thus enwrapped in beauty? Perhaps beauty also had the right to demand that I relinquish my earlier aim. For clearly it is impossible to touch eternity with one hand and life with the other. (Mishima, 1959:124-125)

After the war, the Golden Pavilion remains unscathed by the flames, Mizoguchi, as someone ordinary, realizes that he would never be able to reach eternal beauty:

'The bond between the Golden Temple and myself has been cut,' I thought. 'Now my vision that the Golden Temple and I were living in the same world has broken down. Now I shall return to my previous condition, but it will be even more hopeless than before. A condition in which I exist on one side and beauty on the other.' (Mishima, 1959:72)

He returns to a state of isolation from the eternal beauty of the Golden Pavilion, enduring the psychological torment that beauty inflicts upon him. At this point, Kashiwagi appears, teaching him how to deal with beauty through the Dionysian attitude.

4.3.2. Kashiwagi, the Messenger of Dionysus

Kashiwagi is entirely different from Mizoguchi; his lifestyle embodies the Dionysian tendency that Nietzsche describes. He indulges in pleasure with women, favoring art forms that reflect ephemeral beauty rather than stabilized perfection. Unlike Mizoguchi, Kashiwagi does not attempt to use the beauty of art to mask his physical deformities. Instead, when he produces artworks, his own ugliness stands out, which allows him to perceive the nature of beauty: to him, beauty is not an obstacle in life but a quality that remains unaltered by human intervention. He realizes that true beauty is unapproachable and pure. Kashiwagi understands that the beauty of the world is unrelated to his own ugliness, and nothing he does will change his imperfections,

nor will he be able to sever the source of beauty.

Similarly afflicted with physical defects, Kashiwagi tells Mizoguchi during their first meeting:

It occurred to me that you'd probably get more benefit than anyone else from knowing what I'd done. The very best thing for you might be to do exactly what I did. As you know, that's how religious people smell out fellow believers and that's how teetotalers smell out their fellow teetotalers. (Mishima, 1959:98)

It appears that Kashiwagi is attempting to demonstrate a lifestyle that adheres to the Dionysian spirit, which seeks to reveal the truth of the world by destroying illusions. This is similar to Nietzsche's comparison of the Dionysian figure to Hamlet, where they realize that action cannot change the essence of life, and only by confronting suffering can one fully embrace life:

What Kashiwagi had suggested to me in his talk and what he had directly enacted before me could only mean that to live and to destroy were one and the same thing (...)The life that he had suggested to me was, in short, a dangerous burlesque with which one tried to smash the reality that had deceived one by means of an unknown disguise, and with which one cleaned the world so that it might never again contain anything unknown. (Mishima, 1959:89)

He believes that this approach might help Mizoguchi overcome the gap caused by his stutter, which prevents him from fully engaging with beauty. On the contrary, Kashiwagi recognizes that his own ugliness is an inherent fact, but he accepts it calmly and does not view beauty as a source of distress. Kashiwagi lives by following his desires and he considers the dichotomy between beauty and ugliness to be meaningless to him:

My clubfeet and my women would never touch each other, would never come together; yet together they would be hurled out of the world. Desire rose up endlessly within me. Because my clubfeet and those beautiful feet would never in all eternity have to touch each other. (Mishima, 1959:105)

Mizoguchi is frightened by the lifestyle Kashiwagi reveals to him, as it entirely contrasts with the attitude toward life he had always maintained. Yet, at the same time, he finds himself irresistibly drawn to it:

Such a life lacked everything natural, and it also lacked the beauty of a building like the Golden Temple; indeed, it was little more than a sort of painful convulsion. It is true that I was greatly attracted by such an existence and that I recognized in it my own direction; yet it was terrible to think that one must first bloody

one's hands with the thorny fragments of life. (Mishima, 1959:89)

In the end, however, Mizoguchi accepted the Dionysian attitude toward life and became a person similar to Kashiwagi. His transformation, shaped by Kashiwagi's influence, will be explored afterwards.

Similar to Mizoguchi's encounter with Kashiwagi, in *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach meets a strange old man on the boat to Venice—a Dionysian figure who is “jabbering, laughing, indulging smugly in their gesticulations, and leaning over the railing to shout glib jeers at their friends” alongside a group of young men. This old man catches Aschenbach's attention: “One of them, wearing an extravagantly cut pale-yellow summer suit, a red necktie, and a rakishly uptilted Panama hat (...) he realized with something akin to horror that the man was no youth.”(Mann, 2007:28-29) Aschenbach is repelled by the old man's attempts to dress and act like a young person; however, this man is in fact a foreshadowing of Aschenbach's own fate. Through the comparison of the texts of both characters' behavior and appearance, the drunkard serves as a potential mirror image of Aschenbach. In his pursuit of Tadzio, Aschenbach gradually abandons his dignity and reason, attempting to make himself look younger in an effort to win Tadzio's favor:

He added cheery, youthful touches to his wardrobe, wore jewels, and used scent; he spent long hours several times a day at his toilet, coming to table bedizened, excited, and tense. (...) He felt an urge to revitalize himself, restore himself physically, and patronized the hotel barber with increasing frequency. (Mann, 2007:130)

Even the accessories he wears are strikingly similar to those of the old man: “red necktie” and “broad-brimmed straw hat”(Mann, 2007: 132)

4.3.3. Music and Dreams

Music is a prime example of Dionysian art, as Nietzsche describes: “We encounter truly Dionysian music as such a universal mirror of the world-will: the vivid event refracted in this mirror immediately expands emotionally for us to become the copy of an eternal truth.”(Nietzsche, 2008:94)

As previously mentioned, Kashiwagi approaches life in Dionysian way. He gravitates almost exclusively toward Dionysian forms of ephemeral arts:

Later when I came to know Kashiwagi more intimately, I understood that he disliked lasting beauty. His likings were limited to things such as music, which vanished instantly, or flower arrangements, which faded in a matter of days; he loathed architecture and literature.(Mishima, 1959:136)

He attempts to show Mizoguchi the beauty of music, which can evoke a rich array of emotional experiences.

After listening to Kashiwagi's flute performance, Mizoguchi realizes that the beauty of the Golden Pavilion represents a false, perfect image that allows one to escape from the painful essence of life. In contrast, music is like life because, as it is played, it is ever-changing and unpredictable, embodying an unstable form of beauty: Yet how strange a thing is the beauty of music! The brief beauty that the player brings into being transforms a given period or time into pure continuance; it is certain never to be repeated; like the existence of dayflies and other such shortlived creatures, beauty is a perfect abstraction and creation of life itself. Nothing is so similar to life as music; yet, although the Golden Temple shared the same type of beauty, nothing could have been farther from the world and more scornful of it than the beauty of this building. As soon as Kashiwagi had finished playing the "Palace Carriage", music-that imaginary life-expired, and nothing was left there but his ugly body with its gloomy thoughts, all unscathed and unaltered. (Mishima, 1959:136-137)

Music and dreams symbolize two fundamentally different approaches to life: the Apollonian dream weaves a life of fantasy, using beautiful illusions to conceal the painful essence of existence, while the Dionysian music reveals life's tragic nature, reflecting the raw emotions and realities of life. After experiencing the euphoria in music, Mizoguchi becomes aware of the conflict between the Dionysian and the Apollonian forces within him: "Music is like a dream. At the same time it is, on the contrary, like a more distinct form of consciousness than that of our normal waking hours."(Mishima, 1959:151) This is precisely the new experience that Kashiwagi's music brings to Mizoguchi, and Mizoguchi wonders: "Why will the Golden Temple only permit intoxication and oblivion in the case of music?"(Mishima, 1959:151). "Intoxication" and "oblivion" correspond to the Dionysian state of ecstasy mentioned in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self-oblivion". (Nietzsche, 2008:22)

Although Mizoguchi views music as life itself, within the Apollonian world symbolized by the

Golden Pavilion, music becomes nothing more than a false solace. Mizoguchi realizes that unless he breaks the illusion of the Golden Pavilion, he cannot truly embrace the Dionysian life. Even though he glimpses the essence of the Dionysian world, he remains unable to fully experience or enjoy it. This deepens his understanding of the conflict between Dionysus and Apollo. “At these thoughts, the charm of the music would fade owing to the mere fact that the Golden Temple allowed me this particular pleasure”(Mishima, 1959:151) shows that Mizoguchi realizes the Pavilion’s permission weakens the life force that music represents, rendering it less authentic. *Fade* indicates the power of Apollonian illusion, which diminishes his awareness of life’s tragic nature and prevents him from fully immersing himself in the reality. He remains unable to completely escape the bounds of individuation, longing to merge into the collective human experience and taste the ecstatic joy from it.

4.3.4. Principle of Individuation

Mizoguchi has been immersed in the contrast between the beauty of the Golden Pavilion and his ugly self marked by his stutter. His stutter becomes the foundation upon which he establishes his sense of individuality, distinguishing him from others. It provides him with a strong sense of self-awareness. As Kashiwagi points out:

But compared to what’s wrong with me, do you really think your stuttering is such an important affair? You make too much of yourself, don’t you? As a result, you make too much of your stuttering as well as of yourself.(Mishima, 1959:97)

From their very first meeting, Kashiwagi attempts to convey to Mizoguchi the futility of obsessing over his own flaws. For those like them, marked by ugliness, life should be lived in accordance with desire, even to the point of forgetting one’s own existence. Kashiwagi argues that, as someone deemed ugly, he is no different from others. Once this condition is accepted, one can embrace everything in life, and Kashiwagi says: “But in the end I had understood that desire itself demanded for its fulfillment that I should forget about the conditions of my existence”(Mishima, 1959:102)

Later, through music, Kashiwagi reveals to Mizoguchi the fleeting beauty of life’s transience. He also repeatedly tries to lead Mizoguchi toward liberating his instincts, urging him to experience the pleasures of sexual encounters with women. While these attempts frequently

fail, Mizoguchi's inner thoughts and feelings begin to shift through his interactions with Kashiwagi. Under Kashiwagi's guidance, he is gradually learning to embrace the Dionysian way of life.

Ultimately, under the influence of Dionysian desires, Mizoguchi begins to feel the collapse of the "principle of individuation" (Nietzsche, 2008:137) that had previously isolated him. He no longer feels that his ugliness sets him apart from others, and his individual defect becomes something that can be overlooked. Through this sexual experience, Mizoguchi increasingly embraces the Dionysian way of life. He no longer sees the Apollonian ideals of moderation and the conflict between his own ugliness and the ideal beauty of the Apollonian world as the core of his life's pursuit. Instead, he accepts the Dionysian embrace of primal desires. In this moment, he feels his individuality dissolve into the vast ocean of collective humanity:

I was being handled like a man who is part of a universal unit. I had never imagined that anyone would handle me like this. After I had taken off my clothes, many more layers were taken off me—my stuttering was taken off and also my ugliness and my poverty. That evening I certainly attained physical satisfaction, yet I could not believe it was I who was enjoying that satisfaction. In the distance a feeling that had so far shunned me gushed up and presently collapsed. (Mishima, 1959:221)

4.3.5. Dionysian Destructive Force

Mizoguchi's earlier desire to be consumed by the flames together with the Golden Pavilion stemmed from his pursuit of the illusory beauty represented by the Apollonian vision. However, under Kashiwagi's influence, he gradually becomes drawn to the Dionysian spirit and experienced the collapse of the principle of individuation. His act of setting fire to the Golden Pavilion was a physical destruction—using the flames of Dionysian passion to burn down the Apollonian will embodied by the pavilion.

Meanwhile, Mizoguchi has already broken free psychologically from the Apollonian illusion's hold through his transformation of cognition. Simultaneously, he chooses to destroy the physical Golden Pavilion. His acceptance of the Dionysian spirit is a process that unfolded in both thought and action. I will later explore Mizoguchi's motivation for burning the Golden Pavilion by examining the author's engagement with Japanese cultural traditions.

In the end, through Mizoguchi's inner monologue after the arson, the influence of Nietzschean philosophy in the narrative is once again revealed. When he says, "I felt like a man who settles down for a smoke after finishing a job of work. I wanted to live." (Mishima, 1959:240) it reflects Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati*. Mizoguchi recognizes the tragic essence of the world, transcends the constraints of the Golden Pavilion, and chooses a life that embraces existence and confronts suffering with an active, accepting attitude.

4.4. The Return of Traditional Japanese Culture

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion can also be observed in the context of Mishima's return to traditional Japanese culture beyond the influence of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Analyzing the representation of Zen Buddhism in the novel is crucial to understanding Mishima's aesthetics and his philosophy of action. The grandiose buildings of the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji) mark a high point in the development of Zen architecture. It is a representative temple of the Rinzai sect of Japanese Zen Buddhism.

The Rinzai school, one of the major sects of Zen in Japan, was introduced from China and has deeply influenced various aspects of Japanese society, becoming an integral part of traditional Japanese culture. Zen philosophy has also had a profound impact on Japanese aesthetics and samurai culture, particularly as seen in tea ceremony, flower arranging, and Bushido: "(...)for nearly half a millenium, the intellectual and spiritual climate of Japan bore the distinctive mark of Zen. For a long period, the Japanese lived in an atmosphere saturated with Zen." (Dumoulin, 1989:21)

In the novel, the koan of "Nansen Kills a Cat" appears three times, utilizing the form of a koan to explore complex aesthetic questions. Koan is one of the most representative methods of Zen meditation in the Rinzai school, both serving as a tool for enlightenment and offering universal insights.

A koan, therefore, presents a challenge and an invitation to take seriously what has been announced, to ponder it and respond to it. (...) koan, confronting his disciples with the words of the early masters in order to bring them to sudden enlightenment. (Dumoulin, 1994, 245-246)

Through the repeated use of this koan, the author revisits the relationship between the artist

and beauty, embedding the aesthetic dilemma within the context of Japanese Zen Buddhism, and offering a fresh medium through which to express these complex issues.

The koan of “Nansen Kills a Cat” involves the Zen Buddhist master Nansen who, in an effort to resolve a dispute between two groups of monks who both wanted to keep a kitten as a pet, posed the question, “If any of you can say a word [of zen], this kitten shall be saved; if you cannot, it shall be killed.”(Mishima,1959:73-74) When none of the monks responded, Nansen killed the cat to end the argument. Later, when Nansen asked his disciple Joshu how he would have handled the situation, Joshu placed his shoes on his head and left. This action made Nansen realize: “Oh, if only you had been here today, the kitten’s life could have been saved.”(Mishima,1959:74)

The first introduction of this koan in the novel occurs after Japan’s defeat in World War II, when the Superior of the temple provides an interpretation of the story:

The reason that Father Nansen had killed the cat was that he had cut away the illusion of self and had eradicated all irrelevant thoughts and fantasies from his mind. Putting his insensibility into practice, he had cut off the kitten’s head and had thus cut off all contradiction, opposition, and discord between self and others. This was known as the Murdering Sword, whereas Joshu’s action was called the Life-Giving Sword. By performing an action of such infinite magnanimity as wearing filthy and despised objects like shoes on his head, he had given a practical demonstration of the way of the Bodhisattva. (Mishima,1959:74)

The Superior refers to Nansen’s action as the *Murdering Sword* and compares Joshu’s action to the *Life-Giving Sword*, interpreting Japan’s defeat as a manifestation of the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, forgiving and liberating all beings. He accepted the defeat of Japan in Pacific War, considering it to be a *Life-Giving Sword* for the Japanese people. On this day, he acts as if the defeat was a liberating event for the Japanese, celebrating it, and using Joshu’s action as an excuse to justify his positive attitude toward the defeat.

Mizoguchi, however, argues: “I myself did not feel the slightest unhappiness about having lost the war, but the Superior’s look of overflowing delight had made me uneasy.”(Mishima,1959:74) The Superior’s seemingly inclusive attitude was, in fact, hypocritical, mirroring Mishima’s own disdain for those who live in a life that he saw as self-deception after the war. In an interview, Mishima expressed this sentiment:

僕はそういうことは大嫌いなんです。人間がごまかしてそうやって生きていくというのに耐えられない。本当に嫌いですね。それだけのことです。それはモラルの根底的なところで、どこかでごまかす。(…)そして、みんな、まあまあ、いいや、ご飯を食べて生きて、月給も上がったと喜んでいるでしょう。みんな人生を楽しんでいるでしょう。僕、そういうことはみんな嫌いなんです。ちゃんと楽しむべき理由があつて、楽しむことがジャスティファイされて、そして生きているならいいですよ。(Mishima, 2017:54) [I loathe this. I cannot stand living a lie. This is the only thing I truly loathe. This practice is an attempt to deceive at the most fundamental level of ethics. (...) This is how people are eroded little by little. Everyone is happy, they can eat, they can survive, they get paid, and they get by. I loathe this mentality. Is it really enough to just live like this when there is a reason to enjoy yourself and when enjoyment is justified?]

The second mention of the koan of “Nansen Kills a Cat” is used to reveal the nature of beauty:

Kashiwagi sees through Mizoguchi’s obsession with beauty and, by referencing the koan, reveals to him that beauty, as a conceptual existence, maintains permanent even if its physical vessel (the cat) is destroyed: “[B]eauty may give itself to everyone, it does not actually belong to anybody”(Mishima, 1959:140) Kashiwagi also compares the experience of beauty to the pain of enduring a toothache. People experience beauty just as the way they feel pain. For Mizoguchi, the pain of beauty comes from the abstract illusion of the Golden Pavilion. However, if one tries to find the root of beauty in external objects, he will discover that true beauty is not tied to any physical existence. Attempting to sever the source of beauty, like pulling out a tooth, is futile. Joshu, by placing shoes on his head, subtly mocks Nansen’s action, suggesting that killing the cat, like pulling a tooth, cannot eliminate beauty.

In the conversation between Kashiwagi and Mizoguchi about the koan of “Nansen Kills a Cat”, they are essentially discussing the relationship between the artist and beauty. This manifests different ways of confronting the dilemma of beauty which evolves into a reflection on how the two characters understand beauty, representing Nansen’s action-based philosophy and Joshu’s intellectual approach.

In the third reference to koan of “Nansen Kills a Cat”, Kashiwagi attempts to reveal the relationship between action and knowledge to Mizoguchi, intending to influence his personal doctrine: “Nothing else can change anything in this world. Knowledge alone is capable of

transforming the world”(Mishima,1959:201) Kashiwagi asserts:

The old woman’s wrinkled face had nothing beautiful about it and nothing holy. Yet her ugliness and her age seemed to provide a constant affirmation for that inner condition of mine in which there were no dreams. Who could say that if one were to look without dreaming at any woman, however beautiful she might be, her face would not be transformed into the face of this old woman? (Mishima,1959:104)

Kashiwagi seeks to convey to Mizoguchi that “knowledge” is a shared human consciousness, and individual differences are meaningless within this collective understanding. This interpretation aligns with Joshu’s perspective—that even though Nansen killed the physically beautiful cat, the collective cognition that preserves beauty remains stable. Kashiwagi believes that “human beings possess the weapon of knowledge in order to make life bearable.”(Mishima,1959:174)

In this instance, Kashiwagi’s interpretation of the koan takes on a Dionysian aspect, as he uses it to persuade Mizoguchi: the beauty of the Golden Pavilion cannot be destroyed by his actions. The only way to endure the coexistence of the Pavilion’s beauty and his own ugliness is through cognition. However, Mizoguchi responds with “Beauty, beautiful things, those are now my most deadly enemies.”(Mishima,1959:175) marking his commitment to being “a man of action”. (Mishima,1959:174)

Before preparing to carry out his plan to burn the Golden Pavilion, Mizoguchi finally realizes that what truly holds significance is cognition, not action:

Kashiwagi was probably right when he said that what changed the world was not action but knowledge. And there was also the type of knowledge that tried to copy the action to the utmost possible limit. My knowledge is of this nature. And it is this type of knowledge that makes the action really invalid. (Mishima,1959:235)

The Golden Pavilion, as a physical structure, had endured multiple conflicts and still stood firm against the relentless passage of time, serving as a stable symbol of beauty. However, in the post-war period, its symbolic significance as a representation of beauty had been neglected by Japanese society.

Mizoguchi realizes that a group of powerless individuals gathers around the Pavilion—these

powerless people reflect a large part of post-war Japanese society, who have fallen into a state of decadence and emptiness, living only to satisfy their desires. This mirrors Mishima's acceptance of *Hagakure*, reveals that in the post-war period, people have lost their sense of purpose and meaning in life, drifting aimlessly: "He knows just how paradoxical human freedom is. And he knows that the instant man is given freedom he grows weary of it, and the instant he is given life he becomes unable to bear it."(Mishima, 1977:24)

Mizoguchi's teacher, the Superior is one of the representatives of these powerless and absolute individuals. He tests him three times by committing tricks to see if the teacher was truly as indifferent and emotionless as he appears, trying to provoke him. However, the teacher never displays any anger or strong emotion, embodying the very numbness that Mizoguchi despised.

People like the Superior use the Golden Pavilion as a tool to satisfy their selfish desires, even exploiting it for profit, completely disregarding its beauty. In their perception, the Pavilion has lost its aesthetic value and has become a refuge, providing a stable, comfortable existence for those around it, extracting resources from the Pavilion to feed their greed: "the Golden Temple certainly isn't powerless! It's the root of everyone else's powerlessness."(Mishima,1959:169) Their lives seem to be stable, but this sense of security was fragile and illusory, much like the Golden Pavilion itself. Though it seems eternal, it can be destroyed at any moment

The Superior's behavior of exploiting the Golden Pavilion for profit only attracts more people. Greedy individuals seek to emulate his actions: As Mizoguchi overhears conversations about the Golden Pavilion, where the focus is not on the beauty or spiritual value of these temples but on their economic potential and how to benefit financially. These individuals are absorbed in their mediocre daily lives. Mizoguchi realizes that the *powerlessness* originating from the Pavilion will spread, manifesting itself in people's insatiable desires, trapping them in an endless cycle of greed and dissatisfaction.

Although Mizoguchi realizes that burning the Golden Pavilion is ultimately a futile act, he still chooses to proceed. He hopes that by destroying the Pavilion, its beauty will be revived and kept perfect as a memory, and he seeks to disrupt the lives of those hypocritical and powerless individuals, overturning their mundane existence and awakening them from their numbness with a profound shock:

when the Golden Temple has been burned, the world of these fellows will be transformed, the golden rule of their lives will be turned upside down, their train timetables will be thrown into utter confusion, their laws will be without effect. (Mishima,1959:185)

At the same time, he aims to ignite the beauty of the Pavilion that resides in people's consciousness by stripping away its stable, material exterior, revealing the eternal beauty hidden within its historical layers. Mizoguchi believes that, in the moment of the destruction, the Pavilion will achieve its pinnacle of beauty before vanishing—just like the fleeting beauty of the music Kashiwagi plays. In this way, the transient beauty of the Pavilion becomes immortalized in the realm of spiritual cognition. Mishima, through his work, explores the idea of destroying beautiful things to maximize their beauty, offering an experience of ultimate aesthetic intensity. According to Rankin in *Mishima, Aesthetic Terrorist: An Intellectual Portrait*: “Constant at the center of Mishima's work is the belief, akin to a religious faith, that for a beautiful thing to be made perfectly and eternally beautiful, it must be destroyed.”(Rankin, 2018:34)

This aesthetic of expressing the peak of beauty through violent destruction is deeply influenced by the philosophy of Bushido. The samurai pursued the ideal of “live beautifully and die beautifully”(Mishima, 1977:21-22) through seppuku, seeking a life that is vivid in living and grand in death. This aligns with Bushido's aesthetic of self-destruction. As written in the *Hagakure*, the samurai's guide which reveals the Japanese traditional values: “Men must be the color of cherry blossoms, even in death”(Mishima, 1977:84) Mishima himself noted, “an image of death beyond which there exists a spring of pure water, from which tiny streams are continuously pouring their pure waters into this world, has long enriched Japanese art.”(Mishima, 1977:100)

Mishima believes that in modern society, the meaning of death is often forgotten or avoided. However, *Hagakure* emphasizes that the daily contemplation of death is, in fact, a form of devotion to life itself. This focus on death illuminates everyday tasks, giving them meaning and radiance. Mishima absorbs a philosophical understanding of death from *Hagakure*, affirming that elevating death to the level of conscious thought is key to maintaining spiritual well-being.

In Mishima's philosophy, life gains deeper significance when viewed in the context of death.

He agrees that reflecting on death served to emphasize the value of life. As *Hagakure* discusses the unity of life and death:

But death alone exists unchanged and regulates our lives now as in the era of *Hagakure*. In this sense, the death that Joché is talking about is nothing extraordinary. *Hagakure* insists that to ponder death daily is to concentrate daily on life. When we do our work thinking that we may die today, we cannot help feeling that our job suddenly becomes radiant with life and meaning. (Mishima 1977:29)

Even when faced with the futility of his actions, Mizoguchi still chooses to proceed and attempts to die alongside it in the flames. Though he fails to sacrifice himself, Mizoguchi, in his near-death experience, gains a renewed will to live. He realizes that life itself holds intrinsic meaning, and it is in the destruction of the Golden Pavilion that its beauty is fully revealed. The beauty becomes more precious and eternal because of its destruction. Through this act, Mizoguchi embodies the unity of life and death, calmly accepting all aspects of his existence, including his ugliness, and chooses to live on.

4.5. The Conflict between Dionysian and Apollonian Impulse in *Death in Venice*

Death in Venice reflects Mann's engagement with Nietzschean philosophy of the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces. As Lourenço pointed out, “nunca é demais repetir que a fonte primária de *A Morte em Veneza* não é nem Homero nem Platão, mas sim *O Nascimento da Tragédia* de Friedrich Nietzsche.” [It cannot be repeated enough that the primary source of *Death in Venice* is neither Homer nor Plato, but Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*](Lourenço, 2008:233) Aschenbach's shift in lifestyle, from Germany to Venice, exemplifies the opposite and eventual fusion of the Dionysian and Apollonian spirits.

As mentioned above, Aschenbach leads a life that values discipline and reason before his journey to Venice. His artistic achievements are driven by his strong willpower. As a highly respected figure in society, Aschenbach strictly adheres to a disciplined lifestyle in both his personal and creative endeavors. This approach not only leads to artistic success but also earns him the respect of the public.

However, in his subconsciousness, there is also a Dionysian desire for instinct. This inner conflict becomes particularly evident in two moments: The first occurs when, after

encountering an exotic stranger on the streets of Munich, Aschenbach feels a “seizure and grown into a passion—no, more, an hallucination”(Mann, 2005:6) The second is in Chapter Five, after he decides to conceal the truth about the plague in Venice, where he dreams of a wild ceremony involving “strangergod”(Mann, 2005:128). This dream clearly symbolizes his powerful shift toward Dionysian desire in the intensifying conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces within him: “violently crushing his resistance, a deep, spiritual resistance, and, having run their course, leaving his entire being, the culture of a lifetime, devastated, obliterated.” (Mann, 2005:125-126)

In Aschenbach’s dream:

(...) down tumbled whirling men and beasts, a swarm, a raging horde, inundating the slope with bodies, flames, bedlam, a reeling round-dance: (...) there resumed by a multitude of voices in boisterous triumph—and goading one another on to dance and fling their limbs about they never let it fade.(Mann, 2005:126-127)

They are much like Nietzsche’s description of Dionysian followers: “the infatuated crowd of servants of Dionysus exults under the influence of such moods and knowledge”. (Nietzsche, 2008:48) Among the crowd are “men with horns coming out of their foreheads, fur loincloths, and shaggy torsos”(Mann, 2005: 127), evoking Nietzsche’s image of the satyr, “whom the goat lent its name and attributes.”(Nietzsche, 2008:24) The figure of the satyr Nietzsche also referees to as “Dionysian chorist”(Nietzsche, 2008:45)

Confronted with this chaotic and wild scene, Aschenbach feels intense disgust and fear, and attempts to resist these unrestrained primal desires with order and moderation: “Great was his repugnance, great his fear, honorable his intention to defend his domain against the stranger, the enemy of the serene and dignified intellect”.(Mann, 2005:127-128) At the same time, however, he is also seduced by these desires and eventually becomes part of the revelry, personally participating in this wild ritual. The Dionysian impulse within him ultimately prevails: “But the dreamer was now with them, within them: he belonged to the *strangergod*. Yes, they were now his own self as they hurled themselves upon the animals, lacerating them, slaughtering them, devouring gobbets of steaming flesh”(Mann, 2005:128-129)

“And his soul savored the debauchery and delirium of doom”(Mann, 2005: 129) implies his

betrayal of the god of order, whom he had long revered. After waking from the dream, Aschenbach no longer restrains his actions or conceals his love for Tadzio. Instead, boldly “Like any lover, he wished to please and dreaded the thought that it might be impossible.”(Mann, 2005:130)

In the end, Aschenbach meets his death under the dual forces of Dionysian and Apollonian. As Lourenço observes, “A morte de Aschenbach não é, portanto, apenas o triunfo de Dioniso sobre Apolo,(...) mas antes algo de muito mais grego e muito mais trágico: é também pelo deus, a quem dedicou a sua vida, que Aschenbach é aniquilado.”[Aschenbach's death is not, therefore, merely the triumph of Dionysus over Apollo, (...) but rather something much more Greek and much more tragic: it is also by the god to whom he dedicated his life that Aschenbach is annihilated.](Lourenço, 2008:234-235)

In *Death in Venice*, Mann uses Aschenbach’s internal struggles to reveal the inevitable conflict between rationality and desire—the Apollonian and Dionysian elements—within the artist’s pursuit of beauty. On one hand, artists seek to achieve a sublime state through the rationality and order of the Apollonian spirit; on the other hand, they are irresistibly drawn to the sensory intoxication and desire represented by the Dionysian spirit.

This conflict comes to its climax in Aschenbach’s final internal dialogue, imitating Plato’s *Phaedrus*. In his reflections, Aschenbach reveals the dangers that beauty brings. While beauty has the power to elevate the spirit, it also has the potential to lead to degeneration:

But form and innocence, *Phaedrus*, lead to intoxication and desire; they may even lead a noble man to horrifying crimes of passion that his own beautiful rigor reprehends as infamous; they lead to the abyss; they too lead to the abyss.(Mann, 2005:137)

As I mentioned earlier, the author emphasizes the importance of the balance between reason and emotion in the aesthetics exploration of the artist. When they confront the conflict between Apollonian reason and Dionysian desire on a spiritual level, what is essential is moderation: Beauty, as a form and symbol of purity, has the potential to awaken deep, irrational forces within—the Dionysian state of *intoxication* and the *desire* to possess beauty. *Knowledge* represents the Apollonian reason, which is the necessary force to control Dionysian emotions and desires. Without these constraints, the emotions that beauty provokes may expand

uncontrollably, leading the individual into excessive intoxication with a tendency toward danger.

Unlike Mann, although Mishima in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* also explores the irreconcilable conflict between Dionysus and Apollo, he attempts to find a resolution to this conflict in his work by embracing the Dionysian spirit. Mishima, drawing from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, idealizes the Dionysian individual: "action is repugnant to them; for their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things"(Nietzsche, 2008:46) he emphasizes the use of "knowledge"(Mishima, 1959:201) as a weapon to rebel against fate, to escape from the spiritual prison of the Apollonian beauty, and to break the constraints imposed by the Apollonian world of order.

Subsequently, I attempt to delve deeper into the differing tendencies in the two writers' reception of Nietzsche's theories by comparing their views on the relationship between beauty and social morality, and the role of the artist in society. This exploration will also highlight the different cultural and intellectual sources that shape their perspectives.

4.6. Dualism Between the Artist and Society - Beauty and Moral

In many works by Yukio Mishima and Thomas Mann, artists are the principal characters, and the challenges they face are explored in depth as central themes. Mishima's perspective on the relationship between artists and society was significantly shaped by Mann, particularly with regard to discussions of the relationship between artists and society.

Horst S. Daemmrich points out "artist's gypsy-nature" in Mann's works: "in his literary creations the artist cannot afford a fixed position but must roam in many worlds, be they good or evil"(Daemmrich, 1965:239)

In Mishima's *Poetic Theory*², unpublished but signed under his real name, Hiraoka Kimitake,

² "A collection of literary and philosophical reflections titled *Poetic Theory* (Shi ron) is signed with Hiraoka's name and dated 'May to June, 1945'. *Poetic Theory* remained unpublished and unknown during Mishima's lifetime. It was discovered in the late 1990s during the transferral of his papers to the Mishima Yukio Literary Museum in Yamanashi and was printed for the first time in November 2000 in a special edition of *Shinchō* magazine celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Mishima's death."(Rankin, 2018:13)

the concept of the “poet of aestheticism”(apud. Rankin, 2018:13) is proposed, which is a synonym for artists.

In the view of Mishima, the general public regards artists as “delinquent vagabonds”. (apud. Rankin, 2018:13) “Delinquent” indicates the artists’ characteristic of being unbound by societal ethical standards and not forced to fulfill societal duties, while *vagabonds* reveal the artist as a lonely figure wandering outside the boundaries of society. Mishima is aware of the fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the artist and society.

Both writers observe the similar traits shared by artists and criminals: Mann mentions, “Der Künstler ist der Bruder des Verbrechers und des Verrückten. Meinst du, daß je ein irgend belustigendes Werk zustande gekommen, ohne daß sein Macher sich dabei auf das Dasein des Verbrechers und des Tollen verstehen lernte?”(Mann, 2007:356) [The artist is the brother of the lunatic and the criminal. Do you believe that any amusing work was ever created, save his creator managed to understand the existence of the criminal and the madman?] Similarly, Mishima points out that the kinship between criminals and artists lies in the criminals’ appeal to artists through their defiance of ethical standards. This defiance fosters the artists’ fascination with challenging and transgressing societal norms and violating traditional order:

Nothing stimulates the novelist’s imagination, challenges him, and excites his creative impulse more than a crime that conventional morality has deemed indefensible. It helps him to feel proud of his isolation from the judgment of society, brings him into close affinity with the pride of an unrepentant criminal, and thereby makes the novelist wonder if he is on the verge of discovering a hitherto unknown value standard. (apud. Rankin, 2018:63)

Mann believes that artists are not entirely detached from society, and that their works have an enlightening effect on life. As Horst S. Daemrich notes, Thomas Mann emphasizes this in *Die Aufgabe des Schriftstellers* (1947):

since a true artist is opposed only to a coarse, mediocre, immature, and unintelligent world, not to life as such: ‘He is not the enemy of life as one was wont to believe in Germany for a while.... The intellectual work is life once more, but augmented, clarified, enhanced, inspirited.’(apud. Daemrich, 1965:238)

However, Mishima does not completely agree with Thomas Mann’s idea of the dualism between the artist and society. Instead, he takes a significantly different approach. He suggests

that novelists are not responsible for providing guidance to civic life, nor is their work intended to address societal issues. He explains his confusion about novelists being invited to participate as the most enthusiastic respondents in lifestyle advice columns of newspapers and magazines. He compares this to someone who has only ever drunk orange juice being asked to give advice on how to grow oranges.

In many of his works, Mishima focuses on seeking and attempting to demonstrate the existence of beauty in actions that are not approved by societal norms or ethical standards. These contrast sharply with Thomas Mann's critique of modern artists, whom he describes as having an exaggerated sense of "self" and excessive "freedom", basing their artistic creations on personal awareness. Mann's perspective, as expressed in his essay "Meerfahrt mit Don Quijote", advocates for a "humble craftsmanlike attitude of artists" to art. (cf. Daemmrich, 1965:240)

In *Poetic Theory*, Mishima claims: "the poets protect beauty instead of morals"(apud. Rankin, 2018:13). Rankin concludes that the "poet of aestheticism", as depicted by Mishima, exhibits a clear rejection of traditional moral values: "Hiraoka devotes several paragraphs to an attack on conventional morality. His specific target is the virtue of compassion (dōjō). Compassion, he declares, epitomizes human weakness. It is the 'fundamental sickness of the human race,' nothing more than a 'degenerate love.'"(apud. Rankin, 2018:13)

It is evident that for the "poet of aestheticism" virtue is no longer the standard by which beauty is judged, but rather an obstacle in the pursuit of beauty. By rejecting compassion, Mishima highlights the emphasis on the artist's aesthetic self-interest and their indifference toward moral principles.

Unlike Mishima, Mann does not disregard the value of compassion in an artist. On the contrary, he considers that artists possess a natural capacity for deep empathy, which is essential for understanding the complexities of human nature. When artists take on the responsibility of educating others, Mann emphasizes that their primary goal should be to elevate the individual's spirit. He states:

As their creator, the aesthete is deeply aware that his characters' ideas and opinions, which may seem like valid truths to the reader, are far more relative and open to doubt than they appear on the surface. Because of his great empathy, the aesthete has an excellent understanding of man's marvelous deeds as well as of

his monstrous nature. For this reason he feels that if man has to be educated, this education should aim at civilizing the individual(...) (apud. Daemmrich, 1965:236)

In *Forbidden Colors*, Mishima explores the relationship between beauty and crime in modern society through the dialogue between Shunsuke and Kawada. Shunsuke believes that modern society equates beauty with what is accepted by the masses, resulting in beauty becoming banal. He argues that true beauty should be refined and sublime, even if it originates from acts of misdeed, and should not be defined by societal acceptance. This reflects a fallacy in modern aesthetic, as Mishima suggests a return to the principle of ancient aesthetics, where beauty is independent of both morality and social approval:

The morality of the Spartans had a sense of beauty in it that cannot be excluded from the models of ancient Greece. Subtle evil is more beautiful than coarse goodness, and is therefore moral.

Ancient morality was simple and strong, and thus magnificence was always on the side of subtlety, and humor always on the side of coarseness.

Nowadays, however, morality has been separated from aesthetics. Thanks to cheap bourgeois principles, morality has taken sides with mediocrity and with the 'golden mean.'(Mishima, 1968:268-269)

Mishima disagrees with the traditional interpretation that the story of the boy stealing the fox is considered beautiful because of his self-control. Instead, he emphasizes that crime itself possesses a sense of beauty. This is because he seeks to uncover the beauty in the act from an amoral perspective, appreciating the refined nature of the boy's transgression.

Mishima's aesthetic view is not only influenced by ancient Greek thoughts, but in fact, he replaced Greek aesthetics with a philosophy drawn from the Japanese samurai classic, *Hagakure*. From the idea that "morality is beauty", beauty is disconnected from notions of good and evil. Shunsuke's interpretation of the story illustrates this principle, where the relationship between beauty and morality is overturned. Beauty is no longer subordinate to ethical norms; instead, morality should be judged from an aesthetic perspective, even to the point of neglecting itself.

In "Vorspruch zu einer musikalischen Nietzsche-Feier"(1925), Mann presents his views on the relationship between aesthetics and morality. He declares that in German Romantic aesthetics, healthy vitality coexists with danger and decay. Mann acknowledges the potential "immorality" of beauty and emphasizes the importance of pursuing beauty within the constraints of reason

and morality:

Ist es nicht das Gemütlich-Gesundeste von der Welt, das Liebenswürdige selbst, geboren aus innigsten Tiefen des Volksgemüts? Ja, ohne Zweifel! Allein das ist eine Frucht, die, frisch und prangend gesund diesen Augenblick und eben noch, außerordentlich zur Zersetzung und Fäulnis neigt und, reinste Labung des Gemütes, wenn sie im rechten Augenblick genossen wird, vom nächsten unrechten Augenblick an Fäulnis und Verderben in der genießenden Menschheit verbreitet. Es ist eine Lebensfrucht, vom Tode gezeugt und todesträchtig. Es ist ein Wunder der Seele, — das höchste vielleicht vor dem ‚Angesicht gewissenloser Schönheit, jedoch mit Mißtrauen betrachtet ... vom Auge verantwortlich regierender Lebens- freundschaft und Gegenstand der Selbstüberwindung nach letztgültigem Gewissenspruch ... Selbstüberwindung aber sieht fast immer aus wie Selbstverrat und wie Verrat überhaupt. (Mann, 1996: 301-302)

[Is it not the most cozy and healthy thing in the world, the lovable thing itself, born from the innermost depths of the popular mind? Yes, without a doubt! But this is a fruit which, fresh and resplendently healthy at this moment and just yet, is extraordinarily prone to decomposition and rotteness and, purest refreshment of the mind, if enjoyed at the right moment, spreads rotteness and corruption in the enjoying humanity from the next wrong moment. It is a fruit of life, begotten by death, and fraught with death. It is a miracle of the soul, - the highest perhaps before the 'face of unscrupulous beauty, but viewed with suspicion ... from the eye of responsibly governing friendship of life and object of self-conquest according to the final verdict of conscience ... But self-conquest almost always looks like self-betrayal and like betrayal altogether.]

Mann's conception of artists is deeply influenced by German Romanticism. He suggests that artists have the responsibility to elevate society's spirit, even if they are not restricted to conventional moral standards, their works should still have a positive and enlightening effect on society. His aesthetic ideas emphasize the close connection between beauty and morality, asserting that beauty must be subjected to the scrutiny of reason and moral principles.

While Mishima is influenced by Mann's dualism between the artist and society, he incorporates the aesthetic principles of *Hagakure* and the Japanese samurai aesthetic principles. Mishima insists that beauty can be found independently of morality and can even be realized through acts of evil. He stresses the absoluteness and amoral nature of beauty, reflecting a rebellion against traditional ethics and a critique of modern aesthetic values.

5. Conclusion

In my study of *Death in Venice*, I show how Mann, drawing on ancient Greek aesthetics and Platonic philosophy, explores the artist's ideological conflict in the pursuit of beauty. The influence of classical aesthetics is first reflected in Aschenbach's observation of Venice's natural beauty, where the shifting landscape mirrors the changes in his thoughts. Upon meeting Tadzio, he becomes increasingly drawn to the youth's beauty, reminiscent of an ancient Greek statue. His desire represents both the pursuit of beauty and a gradual loss of self-control. Through this process, Mann reveals the dual nature of beauty: it is both a sublime pursuit and a force that can lead to destruction. Upon realizing the eternal essence of beauty, Aschenbach faces physical death but attains a form of spiritual transcendence through his pursuit.

In *Forbidden Colors*, through a return to ancient Greek aesthetics, Mishima explores the artist's pursuit of youth and immortality. Shunsuke, like Aschenbach, is an artist with a disciplined approach to life and similarly compares the beauty of the young Yuichi to that of a classical sculpture. According to Diotima's discussion of love and immortality in Plato's *Symposium*, I illustrate how Shunsuke's feelings for Yuichi inspire the creation of his finest works. This inspiration stems from the *Erotic Reproduction of Love*, where love is not merely a physical desire, but also a source of creative inspiration and spiritual eternity. In the final teaching scene, a Socratic dialogue emphasizes the relationship between the artist and beauty: Shunsuke's suicide is not an act of self-destruction but a means of achieving the unity of spiritual and physical beauty through death. Mishima, in *Forbidden Colors*, portrays the inner struggle of the artist in the pursuit of beauty and immortality. This pursuit reflects the Platonic philosophy of eros and immortality.

In both *Forbidden Colors* and *Death in Venice*, the influence of ancient Greek aesthetics is evident, as both protagonists pursue the beauty of youthful bodies while facing the conflict between spiritual ideal and physical beauty. However, they meet different fates when confronting the dilemma: Aschenbach becomes an immortal tragic hero in his pursuit of artistic beauty, while Shunsuke chooses suicide to achieve the ideal beauty he envisions.

Aschenbach seeks immortality through the external world. His works make him gain outstanding social recognition and fame, allowing him to be remembered and celebrated after death, much like a classical Greek hero who attains eternal honor. In contrast, Shunsuke

believes that uniting physical and spiritual beauty in his inner world can grant him immortality, reaching the ultimate beauty without depending on others' approval or external validation. He realizes his self-worth through internal fulfillment.

In Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, the conflict between the protagonist Mizoguchi and the beauty of the Golden Pavilion hints at the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian forces. The Golden Pavilion represents an Apollonian illusion, symbolizing reason and order. However, this formalized aesthetic does not bring liberation to Mizoguchi; instead, it becomes a monumental obstacle in his life, preventing him from confronting reality. His obsession with the Golden Pavilion stems not only from his pursuit of beauty but also reflects the psychological dilemma created by the Apollonian *principle of individuation*—his sense of isolation from the world due to his stutter and feelings of ugliness. Kashiwagi, acting as a guide to the Dionysian force, introduces Mizoguchi to an alternative way of life through music and the Zen story of “Nansen kills a Cat”. Through his interactions with Kashiwagi, Mizoguchi gradually embraces the destructive power of the Dionysian spirit, breaking free from the illusions of the Golden Pavilion. His act of burning the temple symbolizes not only rebellion against the Apollonian illusion but also his liberation from self-imposed constraints and his acceptance of the Dionysian ethos. By destroying the Pavilion, Mizoguchi attains spiritual freedom and personal redemption. This act resonates with the influence of traditional Japanese culture on Mishima, particularly the philosophy in *Hagakure* regarding the relationship between beauty and death. Mizoguchi's destruction of the temple embodies Mishima's belief that beauty reaches its ultimate form in destruction.

In contrast, Mann in *Death in Venice* presents the idea that the pursuit of beauty, if divorced from moral restraint, can lead to dangerous consequences. Aschenbach, in his growing obsession with Tadzio, gradually loses his grip on reason and is guided by Dionysian irrational desires, eventually descending into spiritual and moral decay. Mann focuses on the tension between beauty and morality, suggesting that beauty without moral boundaries may lead an artist toward chaos and ruin.

When comparing *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and *Death in Venice*, we see that both authors are profoundly influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy, but they exhibit significant differences in how they engage with his ideas. Mishima leans towards the Dionysian passion, celebrating the acceptance of all aspects of life after fully understanding its essence, while

Mann emphasizes the need for balance between Apollonian reason and Dionysian emotion.

In the final analysis, this dissertation further explores the theme of the duality between artists and society, specifically focusing on the relationship between beauty and social morality. The differing receptions of Nietzsche's ideas by the two authors reflect the distinct cultural contexts from which they emerged. Mishima's work, deeply rooted in Japanese culture—particularly its reflections on death and aesthetics—tends to prioritize the pursuit of beauty above moral judgment. In contrast, Mann, possibly due to his German cultural background, emphasizes the balance between beauty and morality, highlighting the importance of social regulation and the role of reason in restraining individual desires.

These cultural differences profoundly shaped their distinct interpretations and expressions of Nietzsche's philosophy, revealing how shared philosophical influences were filtered through their unique cultural perspectives to create different artistic visions.

My research explores the comparison of authors from different cultural backgrounds and ethnic roots, a method that has become a prominent approach in contemporary literary studies. However, there remains space for expansion, and this comparison holds substantial research value. Through in-depth analysis, we can uncover the universality of human aesthetics and the commonalities in the expression of literary themes. In a cross-cultural context, authors often engage with similar themes. Examining the cultural foundations behind these works helps reveal aesthetic connections across different cultures, offering profound academic insights.

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