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## Fashion Lives in "Death in Venice"

by Stephen Lewis

Ever since *Bonnie and Clyde* influenced the Thirties revival, fashion has looked to the movie screen with a more respectful eye. Each season has brought a *Women in Love*, a *Borsalino* or *The Damned*—a film in which costume, while working within the particular context of the screen, influenced an entire season on the streets and in the showrooms.

This time—and for some time to come—the film is Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice*, the long-awaited screen version of Thomas Mann's poignant novella of an aging author's obsessive infatuation with a 14-year-old boy.

For years the controversial subject matter of the Mann classic prevented its translation into film, although Joseph Losey, Jose Ferrer and John Huston, among others, had each been interested in the idea.

Pressures of the studio censors, along with lengthy entanglements re-

garding rights to the work, combined to abort any serious efforts to film *Death in Venice* until Visconti and a determined legal staff managed to obtain clearance and interest Warner Brothers (who had released that director's *The Damned*) in the project.

For its inception Visconti had two specific talents in mind for the film: Dirk Bogarde to play the author, Gustave von Aschenbach; and Piero Tosi to create the costumes.

Casting Tadzio, the boy who becomes the focal point of von Aschenbach's compulsive obsession, was almost as difficult as clearing the legal rights to the story. Visconti conducted hundreds of interviews all over Europe before selecting Bjorn Andresen, a 15-year-old from Stockholm.

Silvana Mangano was signed as his mother, and Marissa Berenson was chosen for a small role.



It's the white suit with the softly rumpled look for summer. Tosi's "Death In Venice" costumes, like the clothes he designed for "The Damned," are providing designers of contemporary menswear with inspiration. In the film Dirk Bogarde (left) wears the longer-jacketed, unstructured suit with patch pockets; Bjorn Andresen (opposite page, photo by Mario Tursi) heralds the return of the sailor suit.



For the designer *Death in Venice* would be a challenge. For Tosi, who costumed *The Damned* and the Pasolini-Callas *Medea* and who created the makeup for Fellini's *Satyricon*, the more than 700 costumes proved to be another test that his genius was equal to meeting.

He went back to the original clothes of the period, drawing inspiration from couturier Worth's gowns and from costumes in private collections.

Working with the materials and colors of 1911 fashion Tosi created a striking collection of costumes—romantic, relevant to both the period of the story and the current mood of fashion, and, above all, *civilized*.

Already Bill Blass has created a *Death in Venice* men's summer suit, easy and unstructured. The mess jacket and the sailor suit, used by Tosi for Bjorn Andresen, have inspired pieces in several collections, and the shawl-

collared sweatervest and textured country suit will be strong influences in men's wear for fall, 1971.

For Silvana Mangano and the women of *Death in Venice* Tosi has combined a few authentic period gowns with hundreds of his own costumes, working in the silk and linen popular at the time of the story's setting. Detail is the key work to Tosi's interpretation of the look, with the interest in textured fabrics, often slightly rumpled, accented by trims, embroidery and seaming treatments. The hat, broad-brimmed and veiled, is back and along with it the parasol.

For a brief time it appeared that Tosi's costumes and Visconti's interpretation of *Death in Venice* might not reach the screen. At the scheduled start of the production filming was unexpectedly delayed when a last-minute dispute over right to the work delayed shooting.



In "*The Damned*," the longer skirt length was accented by fashion with languid lines. Tosi's "*Death In Venice*" message is detail—trim, seaming, and treatment that takes the eye emphasis off hemline. For Marissa Berenson (left) fabric and a striking neckline combine as the detailed blouse returns. Silvana Mangano (opposite page, photo by Eva Sereny) wears the broad-brimmed hat, back for both the film and fashion's future, with a soft draped dress, braid and embroidery trimmed.







The beach cover up is a big "Death In Venice" look for all ages. The floppy hat (below) together with the longer-legged; one piece beachsuit is scoop or v-necked. The beachdress (opposite) plays patterned fabric against trim for maximum effect. (Photos by Eva Sereny)

Once the filming got underway another problem arose, when it was revealed that Visconti saw the fictional character of von Aschenbach as a thinly-veiled Gustave Mahler, whose music is—not coincidentally—used as the film's score.

Dirk Bogarde revealed that the director had repeated a story he had heard about Mann's meeting an aging man, his rouged cheeks and made-up eyes drowned in tears, on a train in 1911. The man, Mann supposedly learned, was Mahler, who revealed his love for a boy who became the Tadzio of the novella.

The story was vehemently denied by Mrs. Thomas Mann and by Anna Mahler, daughter of the composer. But the controversy it stirred in the European press threatened, for a time, to have repercussions.

Perhaps a property of such intensity

could not be brought to the screen without controversy. But the final achievement is certainly worth all the effort that went into its creation, and the film will be screened for Queen Elizabeth later this month, and then at Cannes, prior to an early summer release.

It has taken a long time, but at last *Death in Venice* lives on film—and, as one might expect, in fashion.









