MUSIC, EROS, AND THANATOS IN THE FILMS OF BUÑUEL, DALÍ, VISCONTI, AND KUBRICK

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While writing *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1938) toward the end of his life, Sigmund Freud postulated a theory of competing drives which exist in the human psyche. Freud pitted a drive for death (Thanatos) against a drive for eroticism (Eros). Unlike Freud, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that the relationship between life and death was not oppositional, but rather in a state of flux. Richard Wagner, on the other hand, treated the relationship in his opera *Tristan and Isolde* as one in which love and death merge to transcend the physical world. This paper sets out to understand how twentieth century filmmakers use musical motifs in their work to illuminate a dialectic between Eros and Thanatos, following the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche or the art of Richard Wagner. The filmmakers in this study, Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, Luchino Visconti, and Stanley Kubrick, use musical motifs of pre-existing classical music of Germany and Austro-Hungary as well as popular music to shed light on the relationship between Eros and Thanatos. I analyzed the music and visual images of four films: *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) *L'Age D'Or* (1930), *Death in Venice* (1971) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) to show how the filmmakers’ musical choices help demonstrate the Eros-Thanatos relationship in the psychology of the characters. The characters in each film are associated with a piece of music, specifically Wagner’s
Tristan and Isolde, Gustav Mahler’s Adagietto from his Fifth Symphony, and György Ligeti’s Musica Ricercata II. I found that Buñuel and Dali’s films follow Freud in a pessimistic view of the Eros Thanatos conflict, Visconti’s film follows both a Wagnerian and Nietzschean view between Eros and Death, one of transcendence and flux, and Kubrick ultimately maintains an ambivalent view of the two drives in line with Freud. As cultural products of the twentieth century, the films can provide evidence of a death drive, illuminate a possible relationship between Eros and Thanatos, can tell us how the two drives are oriented in the psyche, and also provide a way of looking back at the events of the twentieth century.
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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was one of the most turbulent times in history, a time in which revolutions, two World Wars, and a series of economic crashes and recoveries disrupted old paradigms including those defining the relationship between love and death. Although on one hand the events of the century illuminated the darkest parts of our humanity, the century also saw a burst of exploration and creativity, particularly in the field of psychoanalysis and in the art of film. Prior to the twentieth century, many writers and artists had already begun to look inward to try to understand and express this paradox of how humans have the capacity for great heights such as love and creativity but also have the ability to commit atrocious acts of violence against others. In their work, a group of philosophers, composers and writers cradled in the region of Austria and Germany explored their shared belief that life and death were not opposed to each other as previously thought but instead were inextricably linked.

Writing in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Sigmund Freud was among the first to attempt an empirical study of the human mind. A trained neurologist, he is considered to be the father of modern psychology. Freud wrote about the unconscious mind, a powerful force in determining human behavior which is hidden beneath the surface of our consciousness. Freud’s study of the unconscious is a recent addition to humanity’s knowledge of itself, having a profound effect on the way that humans think about themselves. To his credit, however, Freud acknowledged a debt to creative artists in forming his theories, admitting that “it was not I but the poets who discovered the unconscious.”

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Freud’s theories suggest that a work of art has much to offer us in terms of understanding the psyche. In his writings, however, he was for the most part unconcerned with forms of art such as music or film. Instead he turned his psychoanalytic lens on the works of literary and visual artists such as Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. What Freud found in these artists’ work was evidence of the unconscious. In Freud’s view, their creativity is a sublimation of desire, desire that has long been repressed in the unconscious mind. The creative artist, in effect, sublimates his or her desire by transforming libido into aesthetic form.\(^2\) Through the act of creation, the artist makes the unconscious conscious.

Freud relied on his readings of Greek mythology and Greek tragedy in developing his psychoanalytic theories. His interpretation of the Sophocles play *Oedipus Rex* is most important to his theories. In the play, Oedipus unknowingly, one can say unconsciously, kills his father and has sex with his mother. This myth serves as the source for all of human behavior exhibited from birth, the desire of the individual to kill the father and the desire to possess the mother. Freud referred to the mixed feelings of sex and aggression in the child as the Oedipus complex.

In conjunction with the Oedipus complex, Freud posited a duality of instincts which serve as the basis for all human behavior. The biological instinct for life was given the term “Eros” after the Greek god of sexual love and beauty. In Freud’s words “the aim of Eros is to establish ever greater unities.”\(^3\) Sex and creativity can be considered erotic acts. In Freud’s early writings, he explains that human beings are


driven by what he calls “the pleasure principle,” the idea that we act in such a way as to maximize pleasure and reduce displeasure. Opposing this is the reality principle, the idea that humans must delay instant gratification due to the limitations on pleasure that reality imposes. Hence, Freud’s original model understands psychic functioning as a “struggle between the urgent need to satisfy instinctual drives” and the constraints that reality places on the individual.

However, after he lived through the horrors of World War I, Freud introduced a new concept, a “death drive.” Freud states that “the aim of all life is death . . . all life strives to an inorganic zero point.” Freud believed the death drive to be in opposition to Eros. A death drive causes fragmentation with the world, breaking the linkages created through the erotic drive, or in Freud’s words, it “undo[es] connections and destroy things.” Although Freud did not use the term Thanatos, the Greek personification of death, it would later be given to the death drive by Paul Federn, one of Freud’s followers. In light of the Oedipus complex, the Eros/Thanatos conflict can be seen as a competing drive for death against a drive for eroticism.

The death drive in the human psyche can be externalized or internalized. Aggression is, in Freudian theory, an externalization of the death drive. Writing after the First World War and sensing that the world was heading towards another one, Freud became entirely pessimistic in his view of human nature. In the last line of Civilization

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and its Discontents written in 1929, Freud pits Eros against the death drive, asserting that “eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?” The footnote to his text says that this last line was added two years later in 1931 “when the menace of Hitler was already beginning to be apparent.” Ending with this quote, one can sense a feeling of foreboding in Freud’s writing as he foresaw the approach of another War.

Since Freud’s postulation of his theory, the Eros/Thanatos conflict has been in dispute. Norman Brown suggests that life and death drives are not in opposition but more closely related. He elucidates Freud’s theory of the instincts, saying that Freud believed in instinctual ambivalence. Brown calls for a dialectic between the two in which the opposition is reconciled. He refers to the work of pre-Socratic philosophers as models for how Freud’s view differs from his own. Brown writes that “Freud correctly found a model for his own view in . . . Empedocles, who found the ultimate principle of the universe to be the eternal conflict between love and strife. Our speculation has a similar analogy to . . . Heraclitus who asserted the ultimate unity of opposites, including life and death.” Brown’s writings offer a more hopeful, optimistic view of the relationship between the instincts than the view Freud elucidated through his work.

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8 Ibid.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy in many ways serves as a precursor to Freud’s psychoanalytic theories. However, Nietzsche’s view of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos is closer to that of Heraclitus and Brown than Freud. Like Freud, Nietzsche was influenced by Greek mythology and Greek tragedy and like Freud, he wrote about the unconscious as a powerful force in determining human behavior. Nietzsche, however, was a poet as well as a philosopher, an artist with words. Freud was certainly influenced by his philosophy and enamored by the man’s work, famously stating that “Nietzsche had the most complete knowledge of himself than any person who lived or would live.”

It is evident from their work that both men were extremely self analytical, but their attitudes toward life and death seem to be different. Their difference is likely due to the fact that Freud viewed himself as a scientist whereas Nietzsche was an artist as well as a philosopher.

If Freud became pessimistic after living through World War I, Nietzsche’s philosophy is overwhelmingly life-affirming as can be noted in his determination to be a “Yes-sayer” to life. Regarding death he says “it makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death!” This is not to say that Nietzsche was blindly optimistic in his view of life. Although he wrote very little explicitly about death, it is evident from his work that he suffered deeply and had contemplated suicide on numerous occasions. Nietzsche wrote that “the thought of suicide is a powerful solace: by means of it one gets through many a bad night.”

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His contradictory outlook towards death can be attributed to his philosophy of the unity of oppositions. Although both Nietzsche and Freud wrote about instinctual drives, in Freud’s model a polarity between the erotic and death drives exist which cannot be reconciled, whereas in Nietzsche’s writing this polarity does not exist at all. Nietzsche believed all oppositions were in a state of flux, a philosophy which has been characterized by Mark Conard as “an erasure of opposition.”

Nietzsche believed that philosophers’ explanation of the origin of opposites was dogmatic. He faults previous philosophers for not understanding that “almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite? . . . Historical philosophy . . . has discovered . . . that there are no opposites . . . and that a mistake in reasoning lies at the bottom of this antithesis.”

The belief in the lack of oppositions was a motif in his work. Although Nietzsche wrote very little explicitly about death, in The Gay Science he warns his reader to “beware of saying that death is opposed to life.” He repeats a similar claim regarding the relationship between other seemingly opposite ideas. For instance when discussing the interdependence of pain and pleasure, he asks the question “what if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever wanted to ‘jubilate up to the heavens’

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would also have to be prepared for ‘depression unto death’?"\textsuperscript{16} Similarly he links greed and love when he suggests that “Avarice and love . . . it could be the same instinct that has two names.”\textsuperscript{17} For Nietzsche, these seemingly opposite ideas are in fact not opposite but are interdependent and intertwined.

In his earliest work, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music} Nietzsche elucidates his philosophy on the duality between Dionysian and Apollonian creative forces. Apollo, the god of the Sun, represents form and clarity and is associated with sculpture while Dionysus, the god of wine, overflows with life and is associated with music. Nietzsche compares the Apollonian state to the physiological state of dreaming while he compares the Dionysian state to intoxication. The Apollonian represents appearances and illusions and allows for individuation while the Dionysian represents a chaotic and primordial force that breaks down barriers. Nietzsche writes that “the two creative tendencies developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition . . . until at last . . . the pair accepted the yoke of marriage.”\textsuperscript{18} According to Brown, Nietzsche believes that “those who suffer from an over fullness of life want a Dionysian art. Instead of negating, [they affirm] the dialectical unity of the great instinctual opposites: Dionysus reunifies male and female, Self and Other, life and death.”\textsuperscript{19} The Dionysian force in Nietzsche’s philosophy abolishes the duality between instincts due to its overwhelming life affirmation and non-negation of Eros.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 88.


\textsuperscript{19} Norman Brown, \textit{Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History}, 175.
For Nietzsche, Greek tragedy is the celebration of Dionysus, one in which music plays a crucial role. Unlike Freud, music was of central importance to Nietzsche’s life and his philosophy. Nietzsche wrote song lyrics of which his books *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are filled. He is known to have even composed music. Music is a way to replicate the chorus in Greek drama which would narrate the story through song thereby allowing the audience to participate in the tragedy. For Nietzsche, German music was a recreation of the Dionysian spirit. He writes that “out of the Dionysian recesses of the German soul has sprung a power . . . I refer to German music, from Bach to Beethoven, and from Beethoven to Wagner.”

At the time of writing *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872, Nietzsche was very much devoted to the German composer Richard Wagner. A notorious anti-Semite but incredibly gifted composer, Wagner treated the theme of Eros and Thanatos in his opera *Tristan and Isolde* more profoundly, certainly more philosophically, than anyone before him. In his work, Eros is the desire between lovers, whereas death is the only sanctuary possible for the unyielding force of desire. Denis de Rougemont considers Wagner to be the first to have uncovered the latent meaning of this archetype, that is, the desire-death dialectic in *Tristan and Isolde*, an opera first performed in 1865.

Using the medieval Romance *Tristan* by Gottfried von Straßburg as its source, Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* is a tale of two lovers who die for their love. The myth of *Tristan and Isolde* can be considered a variation of the Oedipal myth with the

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psychodynamics of the relationships essentially intact. Tristan and Isolde are thwarted by a father figure King Marke, uncle to Tristan and husband to Isolde, and the patriarchic figure who separates the lovers. Wagner’s operas (he called them music dramas because he disliked the Italian word) were a vehicle for him to recreate Greek tragedy through the use of German folklore. Wagner tried to recreate what the Greeks had done two thousand years before in their tragedies, which was to provide a catharsis for the audience.

Wagner’s philosophy was heavily influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, another German philosopher whose work had a profound influence on Freud and Nietzsche as well. In fact, the anti-rationalist Schopenhauer can be considered the philosophical father to all three men. Schopenhauer, in turn, was influenced by Buddhist philosophy in which the state of nirvana, an “extinguishing” of all desire, is the ultimate goal of life.

Wagner’s letter to Franz Liszt demonstrates the volatile emotions he had regarding life and death and the impression that Schopenhauer’s philosophy left on him:

His [Schopenhauer’s] chief idea, the final negation of the Desire of life, is terribly serious, but it shows the only salvation possible . . . If I think of the storm of my heart, the terrible tenacity with which, against my desire, it used to cling to the hope of life, and if even now I feel this hurricane within me, I have at least found a quietus which, in wakeful nights, helps me to sleep. This is the genuine, ardent longing for death, for absolute unconsciousness, total non-existence.  

Whereas Freud treated the relationship between Eros and Thanatos scientifically and Nietzsche treated it philosophically, Wagner treated the theme artistically in his opera. The overture of Tristan and Isolde begins with a musical theme of death and desire, a leitmotif that reoccurs throughout the opera. For example, the drinking of a love potion, an act that binds the two lovers in love and death, consists of both motifs played

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in succession. Wagner was among the first composers to use the chromatic scale and employ dissonance in order to connote abstract ideas such as desire and death. The death motif is a descending chromatic line whereas the desire motif is an ascending chromatic. The music is played softly but gradually builds into a wide range of dynamics, making use of deceptive cadences that fool the ear into hearing a resolution. The building of unresolved tension is critical to the music drama as the unfulfilled passion of the two lovers can be heard and felt throughout the opera.

The distinction between love and death culminates into a transcendental merging of lovers in Wagner’s opera. The most recognizable music from it comes from the last act in which Isolde sings her Liebestod, a word which translates literally to mean “Love’s death.” Wagner never actually called this music a Liebestod, instead he called it a transfiguration, from earthly self into spiritual substance. Isolde is transfigured in death, attaining a spiritual transformation in which she becomes one with her lover. With this union comes the resolution of the opening chord when the tension is finally released in Isolde’s death. For Slavoj Žižek, “Wagner’s solution to Freud’s oppositional placement of Eros and Thanatos is . . . [that] love itself culminates in death, its true object is death, longing for the beloved is longing for death . . . the death drive . . . is the very opposite of dying . . . it is the opposite of what the term seems to signify.”23 In Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, there exists a very different treatment of the conflict between Eros and Thanatos than Nietzsche or Freud, one in which the lovers are able to transcend the earthly realm in their deaths.

Wagner’s music is not only important for his treatment of the theme of love and death but his work can also be considered the pre-cursor to cinema. His music dramas,

23 Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, Opera’s Second Death (New York: Routledge, 2002), 106.
what he referred to as a Gesamtkunstwerk, or total art-work, synthesized many forms of art, from painting to theatre to music. The Gesamtkunstwerk was a way to return to Greek tragedy which Wagner believed to be the epitome of what art should be since it incorporated different art forms into one.

The ability to pair music with visual images to create a synthesis of art forms is unique to opera and film. While Wagner was the first to recreate this total artwork, it wasn’t until the turn of the century that the new medium of film was created and not until a number of years later that sound technology allowed the use of music in film. The soundtrack allows artists to “compose” music to their visual images, helping to create new meanings in the artist’s work by the juxtaposition of sound and image. When coupled with music, the images increase their potency. However, little work has been done on studying how filmmakers use music in their films. Claudia Gorbman refers to this as “visual chauvinism,” the tendency on the part of film critics and audiences to ignore how a piece of music functions in a film, placing more emphasis on the act of seeing a film rather than hearing it.

Four filmmakers in the twentieth century, Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, Luchino Visconti, and Stanley Kubrick were influenced by the culture of the German and Austro-Hungarian region. The music of Richard Wagner, Ludwig van Beethoven and Gustav Mahler had as much an influence on these artists as the philosophy of Nietzsche and the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. Their music oftentimes has its own philosophy, like Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, which is exploited by the filmmakers in the soundtracks to their films in order to shed light on the relationship between Eros and Thanatos. I will analyze four films by these four twentieth century filmmakers and
demonstrate how they weave pre-existing classical music from Austro-Hungarian and German composers into their motion pictures to create works of art that illuminate the dialectic between Eros and Thanatos. These artists use musical motifs in their work, creatively scoring the music to their motion pictures which when coupled with the film images creates a rich visual and musical tapestry. In their films, each artist uses the composer’s music in order to create his own Eros/Thanatos dialectic.

These four filmmakers’ artwork ultimately shows a dialectic between Eros and Thanatos influenced by a combination of the work of Freud, Nietzsche, or Wagner. The films by Dalí and Buñuel rely heavily on Wagner’s music but ultimately show a more pessimistic view of the Eros and Thanatos conflict in line with Freud. The Eros/Thanatos dialectic in Luchino Visconti’s film is more ambiguous, showing both a Wagnerian and Nietzschean influence. Stanley Kubrick’s final film reverts back to a Freudian view of competing erotic and death drives, however, at the same time the film’s final image presents an outcome seemingly opposite to Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, one that ends in the act of sex instead of death.

In the first chapter I will analyze the music and visual images in two films by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, Spanish surrealists who were deeply influenced by the music and emotion behind Tristan and Isolde. Collaborating on the films in the late 1920s, Un Chien Andalou (1928) and L’Age D’Or (1930), the artists use the Liebestod from Tristan and Isolde along with other pieces of music, as a counterpoint to images of Eros and Thanatos.

Buñuel and Dalí’s treatment of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos is different from the treatment of the theme in Tristan and Isolde. In this chapter I will
show how the filmmakers follow Freud instead of Wagner in their view of the dialectic between the erotic and death drives. Unlike Wagner’s lovers, Buñuel and Dalí’s unnamed lovers never merge transcendentally, never fully unite. Instead they end up separated in life and in death.

In the second chapter, I will analyze the music and images in Death in Venice (1971), a film adapted from a Thomas Mann novella with the same name. The film is part of what is known as “The German Trilogy,” a series of three films by Visconti which has Germany as the subject matter. According to Henry Bacon, “to Visconti Germany meant above all culture: Goethe, Mann, Wagner . . . [and] the Austrian variety-Mahler.”

The art and culture of Germany was important to Visconti not only as subject matter for his films, but also as an influence on his style of filmmaking.

Death in Venice is a film about a composer Gustav von Ashenbach who, while convalescing in Venice, falls in love with a young boy. Through this act he is led to his death. At their core both the film and novella’s philosophical source derive from Nietzsche and Wagner. The film is unlike the other films in this study in that it does not treat Thanatos as Freud’s aggressive death instinct but rather treats death as a release from the tension of life. According to Fletcher, it is the “music [that] provides the key to this worldview . . . like the dithyrambic style in Nietzsche’s philosophy, music is allowed to have the force of destiny.”

Visconti uses the Adagietto from Gustav Mahler’s Fifth Symphony most prominently as a motif, playing a major role in the soundscape of the

\[24\] Henry Bacon, Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 139.

In addition Mahler’s *Third Symphony* and Beethoven’s *Für Elise* both play an important role in the film in helping to show the Nietzschean influence on the film.

In the third chapter, I will analyze the music and images of Stanley Kubrick’s last film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). The film is an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler’s novella *Dream Story*. It tells the story of a married couple who are confronted with their deepest desires and deepest fears after they question their fidelity to each other. Kubrick’s films contain some of the most harrowing images of eroticism mixed with death ever captured on film, however, the film ends on what seems to be a hopeful note. Though it ends in with a reference to sex instead of death, the film is perhaps his most ambivalent.

Kubrick is widely regarded as an innovator in using pre-existing music in film. His films reveal a fascination with European writers and musicians such as Freud, Nietzsche, Beethoven, and György Ligeti, a Hungarian composer whose music he originally used for his masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey* and whose music is featured in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The minimalist composition by Ligeti, *Musica Ricercata II* used in the film aids in creating the Freudian worldview the film exemplifies. As Gorbman has noted, the music is not so much scored to the film as it is “forges a bond between story world and soundtrack . . . like the bond between two elements that make epoxy.”

It is only fitting that the first film to be analyzed was made the year before sound technology enabled the “talkies” to be born in 1928. It is also fitting that the last film to be analyzed was completed in 1999, the last year of the century. The use of music in the films will become increasingly complex as I will demonstrate by an analysis which

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moves from the first film in 1928 to the last film in 1999. The century seems to be characterized by its own polarizing events seen in the events of War on one hand and the exploration and creativity of psychoanalysis and filmmaking on the other. The culture of Austria and Germany is inextricably tied to these events as well as to the films in this study. As cultural products of the twentieth century, the films can provide evidence that a death drive exists in human mind, illuminate a possible relationship between Eros and Thanatos, can tell us how the two drives are oriented in the psyche, and also provide a way of looking back at the events of the twentieth century, one that can be considered the century of love and death.

From the music of Beethoven and Wagner, philosophy of Nietzsche, and the psychoanalysis of Freud, the art and culture of this region had a tremendous impact on the art of these four filmmakers. The theme that they all have in common is the treatment of love and death in their work. In a brilliant analogy between music, love, and death de Rougemont tells us that “the chord that awakens in us the most sonorous echoes has for its tonic and dominant, so to speak, the words ‘love’ and ‘death’.”27 I will show how these twentieth century filmmakers use music to create a dialectic between Eros and Thanatos in these four films.

27 Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 15.
In a documentary film on the life and works of Salvador Dalí, Dalí’s caretaker comments that “life and death are two concepts that are always present in Spanish art . . . from our mystics, to our saints to our great artists.”\(^1\) Certainly both Dalí and his compatriot Luis Buñuel fit into this last category. In the late 1920s, the two collaborated on the films *Un Chien Andalou* and *L’Age D’Or*, films in which sounds and images of Eros and Thanatos are present throughout. The films demonstrate the profound effect the music of Richard Wagner and the writings of Sigmund Freud had on the two artists. The two artists use the *Liebestod* from *Tristan and Isolde* along with other pieces of music as counterpoint to images of death and desire. However, Buñuel and Dalí’s treatment of this theme is different from Wagner’s treatment in *Tristan and Isolde*, following a more pessimistic Freudian view instead. The Eros/Thanatos dialectic is one in which, similar to Freud’s theories, sexual and aggressive unconscious forces compete against each other unlike in Wagner’s opera in which Eros and death coalesce to transcend the material world.

Both artists grew up listening to the music of Wagner and use Wagnerian motifs in their own artwork. In addition to the two films mentioned above, Buñuel used the *Liebestod* for the entire soundtrack to his film *Abismos de Pasion* (1954), a film based on Charlotte Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, another tragic story of two passionate lovers. In *El Ángel Exterminador* (1962) a woman is referred to as a “Valkyrie,” an allusion to the

\(^1\) Quoted in *The Definitive Dalí*, VHS, dir. by Adam Low, (Los Angeles, CA: Image Entertainment, 1986).
mythological characters in Wagner’s music drama Die Walküre. Buñuel even created a feminine version of Tristan in Tristana (1970) demonstrating how important Wagner’s influence was not just on the musical choices the director made but also on the characters for his films. Buñuel was so affected by Wagner’s music he is reported to have evoked it to direct a scene, telling an actor to “stare out the window and look as if you’re listening to Wagner . . . No, no – not like that. Sadder. Much sadder.”\(^2\) Wagner’s music had a lasting impact not only on Buñuel’s filmmaking but also his vision of love and death.

Salvador Dalí had a life long fascination with Tristan and Isolde as well. In addition to making these two films which employ the music of Tristan and Isolde, he choreographed a ballet originally called Mad Tristan (1944) which due to the lavish sets would never be performed. He did however paint his own vision of the two lovers which has survived. The Liebestod is even used prominently in the documentary film on his life, further associating Dalí with Wagner’s masterpiece. He can be seen humming along to it while he paints.

The overture and Liebestod from Tristan and Isolde is used as a motif in both Un Chien Andalou and L’Age D’Or. According to Linda Williams, the use of music in the films is Buñuel and Dalí’s way of “putting into practice the theory of image-sound counterpoint created by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov . . . rather than redundant accompaniment to the visuals.”\(^3\) The music is used ironically in the film. It serves as a contrast to images from dreams of the artists, existing works of art, religious imagery,

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and even the instinctual life of insects. The filmmakers juxtapose Wagner’s Eros and Thanatos dialectic with their own in the two films.

In addition to Wagner’s music, both men were certainly also influenced by the works of Sigmund Freud. Both men read *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1911), Freud’s book in which he claims dreams are the “royal road to the unconscious.”

Freud’s writings on dreams, religion and his use of mythology to code reality all resonated with the filmmakers. Dream, religious, and mythological imagery can be seen in both films in this study, an influence which can be traced back to Freud.

Dreams and the unconscious were central to the Surrealist school to which the artists belonged along with André Breton, Rene Magritte, Ernst Mach, Yves Tanguy, and Joan Miró. The leader of the group, Breton, wrote the *First Surrealist Manifesto* in which he claims that the goals of the Surrealists were to “emphasize the importance of the unconscious, of instinctive desire as opposed to exercise of reason and logic.”

The surrealists championed what they called *l’amour fou* or “wild love.” Buñuel and Dalí imaginatively capture this wild love in their films, but at the same always juxtapose these images with images of death and decay.

In addition to the belief in the importance of dreams, both filmmakers shared with Freud the belief that religion impeded an individual’s pursuit of happiness. Despite living in a religious Spain, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí rejected their Catholic religion, which they believed to be a repressive force on themselves, a religion which espoused the

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doctrine of original sin as the source of man’s fall from grace. Buñuel characterized the overly religious environment in the region of Calanda where he grew up as a place “where the Middle Ages lasted until World War I.”\(^6\) The two artists were not able to reconcile their sexual desires with a religious doctrine which they felt caused them guilt and shame. Buñuel once remarked, “for me, throughout my life, coitus and sin have been the same thing . . . and I also have felt a secret but constant link between the sexual act and death.”\(^7\) Buñuel and Dalí were both haunted by this conflict and thus created their art as a way of resolving their unconscious conflicts. As a result women became a source of anxiety for the two men as can be witnessed in these early works. The films capture the directors’ unconscious desires and anxieties which revolve around sex and death, images that reflect their libidinal desire and the anxiety associated with it.

Both artists found an affinity between their views on religion and Freud’s psychoanalytic theories on the subject. For Freud religion is a mass delusion which people choose to believe in order to escape from the reality of their lives. He describes it is a way back to the “oceanic feeling” of being one with the world which occurs in infancy. For Freud, the omnipotent God as Father is a psychological projection of the helpless infant’s need for protection by a force more powerful than itself. Regarding the idea of God as Father, Freud writes “only such a being can understand the needs of the children of men . . . the whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., 51.
anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life.”

Freud’s explanation of his theory of three psychic structures, the id, ego and superego, relies on a narrative which involves a duality between sexual and aggressive instincts. The killing of the father by a primitive band of brothers is the historical event in Freudian theory which allows these structures to evolve. The desire to kill the father is a result of the father’s usurpation of power and sex. Freud writes that “man’s sense of guilt springs from the Oedipus complex and was acquired at the killing of the father by the brothers banded together . . . remorse was the result of the primordial ambivalence of feeling towards the father. His sons hated him, but they loved him, too.” According to Freud, “the primal father did not attain divinity until . . . after he had met his death by violence.”

The guilt the child feels from the desire to kill the father and simultaneous desire for the mother stems from this primal act, creating the superego while the undesired feelings are repressed into the psychic structure of the id. The superego acts as the conscience while the repressed id contains powerful libidinal forces. The ego, on the other hand, serves as a mediator between the two other psychic structures.

The filmmakers not only attempt to film representations of two of Freud’s psychic structures, the id and superego, but also rely on Greek mythology to tell their story. According to Dawn Ades, “Dalí [and Buñuel] use myth to code reality . . . following

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9 Ibid., 95.

10 Ibid., 107.
Freud in appropriating age-old symbolic narratives and fables.\textsuperscript{11} Works of art otherwise perceived as peaceful are conflated with Greek tragedy, taking on violent and sexual connotations in the artists’ minds. The filmmakers insert these works of art into an autobiographical framework, allowing them to create their unique vision of sex and death on screen. Like 	extit{Tristan and Isolde}, 	extit{Un Chien Andalou} and 	extit{L’Age D’Or} center around the story of two lovers but ultimately the artists follow Freud’s pessimistic view of the conflict between Eros and Thanatos rather than Wagner’s transcendental union. Their lovers unite neither in life nor in death.

\textit{A Gob of Spit in the Face of Art}\textsuperscript{12}

	extit{Un Chien Andalou} (1928) is a seventeen minute short film, widely regarded as one of the first cinematic surrealist masterpieces. Although the film consists of very powerful images, the sound of the film is just as important to creating the Eros/Thanatos dialectic in the film. On the soundtrack, Wagner’s \textit{Liebestod} alternates between two Argentinean tangos, both types of music that are associated with carnal desire. Since the film was produced during the silent film era in 1928, the film originally had no soundtrack. Buñuel actually stood behind the screen in the Paris theatre and alternated the music on two phonographs during its original screening. The soundtrack wasn’t recorded until 1960, at the instruction of Buñuel who supervised the music.

As a surrealist film there is no obvious discernible plot, only a sequence of dreamlike images which can be interpreted in many different ways. The film takes on the idea of “dream-work” rather than the content of a dream, the mechanisms of a dream,


rather than a dream’s meaning. Buñuel is reported to have laughed at some of the interpretations of the film, however, he did admit that the one interpretation that could work was a psychoanalytic one. According to Linda Williams, the film offers “a semblance of narrative coherence, much like the feeling when wakened from a dream’s radical incoherence . . . covered up by [the] false appearance of intelligibility.”¹³ It does so by using various filmic techniques such as iris shots, soft focus lenses and dissolves to give the appearance of a dream. Elsa Adamowicz concisely describes the series of events in the film as “a moonlit night, a violent crime, the complicity between torturer and victim, male seduction and female resistance, frustrated sexual chases, murder, separation, and death.”¹⁴

Buñuel reportedly referred to Un Chien Andalou as “a desperate, passionate call to murder.”¹⁵ According to the director, the idea for the film came from the dreams of both himself and Dalí, dreams which are both featured in the film. Buñuel’s dream can be seen in the prologue, a violent introduction which begins with the tango, a type of music that has its own association with the carnal. The tango plays for over one minute while the opening credits roll, setting up an expectation for the film through the use of the music. The tango is not only a style of music but is also a sexually charged dance performed between couples who are in close proximity to each other. Its association with desire is used ironically by the filmmakers. The expectation of sexuality that we get from the music is completely shattered by the violent ending of the prologue.


¹⁵ Ibid., 1.
The film’s opening title card “Il était une fois” (Once upon a time) sets up another expectation for the film. Instead of a fairy tale though, the audience receives one of the most shocking images in film history, a shot in which an eyeball is sliced open with a razor. The image of the eye cut open by the razor according to Williams “has become an emblem of surreality in film in much the same way as Dalí’s melting watches have become in painting.” These two images, the eye slash and the melting watches from *The Persistence of Memory* (1929), are both instantly recognizable and conjure up the psychic space of the Freudian unconscious.

The autobiographical nature of the film is demonstrated by both men playing roles in the film. The opening of *Un Chien Andalou* reveals a man, played by Buñuel, in a close-up shot, sharpening a blade and using it on his finger to test its sharpness. The next sequence of shots we see the character stepping out on a balcony. As he looks out onto the Parisian night sky, the director cuts between the man’s face and a sliver of a cloud across the moon. The moon, often associated with influencing a person’s state of mind, seems to exert control over the man. This is an obvious act of passion, though the man does not appear to be a lunatic. The next shot cuts to the man holding open a lady’s eye, the same lady who will become the main female character of the film. In a match to action of the sliver of cloud cutting through the moon, the razor slices open the eyeball as an aqueous fluid spills out.

Vision is not only crucial to the artists in order to create their work, but also to life in general since it is through the senses that we are able to experience the erotic. The slashing of the eyeball happens not only literally to the woman but also can be thought of

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as a metaphor for the audience members' eye whose vision will be assaulted by the filmmaker. The scene demonstrates how art can be both simultaneously erotic and violent. This type of violence is in conjunction with the spirit of the Surrealist movement whose purpose was to be anti-aesthetic, wanting to create an assault on the senses. Having the razor slash the cornea is a way in which Buñuel and Dalí show how a destructive act can be juxtaposed with an erotic act to give new meaning to the sequence and set up a new expectation for the rest of the film.

Whenever there is a distinct transition in time or events the music switches from the tango to the *Liebestod* and back again. The transitions of time and music are two of the various ways in which Buñuel and Dalí create a sense of surrealism. These transitions aid in making the film more like a dream in which the two types of music seem to be one continuous piece. As the story transitions from the extreme violent act of the prologue to a sequence of eroticism and death, the *Liebestod* gradually builds into a crescendo as the lovers in various scenes attempt to consummate their passion but are continually thwarted by internal forces. For Adamowicz, “the Wagner sequences, accompanying the scenes of love, death, and the death of love heighten the emotional charge of the narrative.”\(^\text{17}\) In each case the filmmakers time the most dramatic events with the increasing tension of the music.

The next scene begins, according to the intertitle, *Huit ans après* (eight years later). The audience is introduced to the two nameless lovers, the main characters of the film. The scene begins with external shots of the Parisian streets where a man rides his bicycle. This character serves as an autobiographical vehicle for the two artists. Next, an

\(^\text{17}\) Elza Adamowicz, *Un Chien Andalou*, 36.
iris shot opens to the same actress who had her eye slashed, now with both sense organs intact, sitting and reading from a book. As the woman suddenly jerks her head up, her eyes are filled with desire as she senses the young man outside her apartment building. An insertion shot of the young man on his bicycle is placed between shots of the young woman so there is no mistaking that he is the object of her desire. She throws the book to the ground where the pages turn to an image of a seated woman intently working on a piece of lace.

The image is a painting by Vermeer, *The Lacemaker* (1670), and is the first image to be used having its own textual meaning outside the film which the filmmakers use to subvert the audience’s expectations. The painting which hung from Dalí’s father’s study had made a huge impression on Dalí in his youth. Dalí explains upon viewing the painting that “very often I felt the pin’s sharpness piercing my flesh . . . up until now *The Lacemaker* has always been considered a peaceful, calm painting, but for me it is possessed by the most violent aesthetic power.”


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at the next image in the film which has Freudian connotations, an image of the man’s hand containing ants crawling from a hole in it.

This image, according to Buñuel, came from one of Dalí’s dreams. The hand is most likely used as a symbol of an auto-erotic act. The theme of masturbation in Dalí’s work surfaces clearly for the first time around the late twenties and early thirties. Dalí frequently engaged in the act, painting some of his most famous works around this time, *The Great Masturbator* (1929) and *Le Jeu Lugubre* (1929), paintings that contain subtle and overt pictorial references to masturbating.

However, the hand is hardly ever seen without images that evoke shame or guilt or in the case of the ants, disintegration or death. Ants are instinctually drawn towards refuse and other waste material, a fact that made an impression on Dalí. They are another common motif in Dalí’s work, seen usually crawling and gathering around inorganic or organic life. For Iampolski, Dalí “created an entire mythology around ants . . . which seem on one hand to symbolize putrefaction . . . or on the other hand, they also function erotically being associated persistently with pubic hair . . . their ambivalent status allows them to unify themes of death and Eros, a gesture important to Dalí.” Ants as well as other insects are frequently used in both artists work in order to compare and contrast with the instinctual lives of humans.

The ants crawling from the hole in the hand conjures up the image of the stigmata and is another way in which the artists show the interdependence between life and death, as Christ’s crucifixion is one of the most important symbols of the Christian religion. The stigmata are symbolic of the suffering that Christ endured in order to save

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humankind, linking life and death in Christ’s sacrifice. The act of giving eternal life to humankind as a result of the extreme act of violence of Christ’s crucifixion is another way in which Eros and Thanatos are inextricably linked in the Christian religion. The image of the stigmata associated with the artists’ sexual guilt underscores the conflicting feelings the artists had towards Christianity.

Buñuel timed the most powerful moments of the *Liebestod* to coincide perfectly with images of death, the orchestra reaching its height twice in the film, each time when there is a scene in which someone dies. Through a series of dissolves, the hand returns in the next scene where an androgynous figure on the street below probes a now completely detached hand with a stick while the couple watches from the apartment window. The strains of the *Liebestod* become more powerful and evocative, building up to a climax. As cars flash by, the androgyne takes possession of the hand before she is struck by one of cars and dies. In this particular scene, the orchestra swells in what sounds like a paroxysm of desire, switching back to the tango before the music resolves.

The death of the androgyne seems to spur the man’s desire. What follows next is a scene in which the man sexually pursues the woman played out to a tango which returns to the soundtrack. Momentarily capturing her, the man caresses her breasts which turn into buttocks and turn back into breasts. As he caresses the woman’s body, his eyes roll back into his head, drool which looks like blood fomenting from his mouth. The on-screen visual orgasm is yet another link between sex and death, what the French call, *le petit mort*. According to Williams “when the man begins to caress the woman’s breast, his passion immediately evokes a reaction that approximates death . . . love and death are inextricably connected, because only the transgression and separation of death can
accomplish the ultimate union of love.”²¹ This is a very Wagnerian treatment of the theme, one in which the passion of the lovers ends in death, however, in Wagner’s opera, the desire is mutual whereas in *Un Chien Andalou*, the erotic advances of the man are unrequited. This is one example of how the filmmakers differ from Wagner in their view of the reconcilability between love and death.

As the chase ensues, Dalí also makes his appearance in the film dressed as a Jesuit priest dragged on two ropes by the male protagonist with two rotting donkey carcasses and two pianos. The donkey carcasses and pianos are a motif used in many of Dalí’s paintings. Here it is possible that the directors use these images to symbolize the weight of the contents of the protagonist’s psyche, that is, religion, culture, and the thought of death, impeding his desire for the female figure. It is obvious from this image that both forces are strong, but one will ultimately be victorious.

The next time the music switches back to the Liebestod, the intertitle reads *seize ans avant* (sixteen years before). This final transition to the *Liebestod* accompanies another Freudian scene, culminating in the decease of the male figure who is killed by none other than his own self, a representation of the death of the man’s own super-ego. The flashback to so many years before places the character in the time of childhood where super-ego development occurs. After the man is admonished by his own double, his super-ego turns around in slow motion to retrieve two books from a child’s desk. According to Williams, the double’s actions “indicate an authoritarian role – either father or teacher.”²² He places these books in the man’s hands and turns around to leave the room. However he doesn’t get very far before he succumbs to another shocking act of

²¹ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 87.
²² Ibid., 92.
violence, the books turning into guns. This change from literary art into weapons used to kill is another way the artists explore the relationship between Eros and Thanatos, the erotic act of literary art turned into a display of violence against the self.

The only time the music resolves in the film occurs when the man is carried away in a funeral procession of sorts. The man fires these guns at his super-ego essentially killing his guilt ridden conscience. As the man dies a dissolve changes the scene from the inside of the apartment to an external shot in a meadow. He dies reaching for his lover whose back is turned to him in a pose reminiscent of an erotic nineteenth century painting, another moment in which “extreme agony coincides with a moment of sensual bliss.” The resolution of the music is used by the filmmakers to comment ironically on the action of the film. The solitary funeral procession is the opposite of the way in which Tristan and Isolde are transfigured in death.

The release of tension in the climax of the music is followed with a final return to the tango. Another chase ensues in which the man’s erotic advances are unrequited. According to Williams, “though the death of the super-ego frees the [man] from the social forces that have attempted to sublimate his sexual energy, it also leaves him insufficiently socialized and, as far as the woman is concerned, irrelevant.” The female figure finds another partner, stepping out of the apartment and onto the beach with him as the film ends with the original tango.

The last image, which serves as an epilogue to the film, compositionally reproduces Millet’s Angelus, another image that haunted Dalí from childhood.

23 Ibid., 94.

24 Ibid., 95.
According to Fiona Bradley, for Dalí the painting had a “mythic power, most enigmatic, dense and rich in unconscious thought.”

The painting is of a peasant couple, called by the Angelus bell to a rustic scene, engaged in what looks like a prayer. In the foreground lies a basket and next to the couple lies a wheelbarrow.

Using his paranoiac-critical method of painting, Dalí superimposes the myth of Oedipus onto the Angelus painting. Dalí invented the method of painting in which he puts himself in the state of mind of a paranoiac in order to create his work. If Dalí’s method was to replicate the mental state of paranoia, he distinguished himself from someone who is suffering from the debilitating mental illness, famously stating that “the only difference between Dalí and a madman is that Dalí is not crazy.”

In Dalí’s imagination, the basket covers the grave of the couple’s deceased son, the wheelbarrow signifies sexual desire, the male’s hat covers his erection, and the female peasant becomes “an agent of sex and death.” Interestingly, Dalí’s intuition about the basket may actually have been correct. A scientific analysis of the work showed that Millet had actually painted over a box-like figure that appears to be in the shape of a coffin.

The final static shot in which the lovers are buried in sand on a beach, begins with a title card which promises *Au printemps* (spring). The title card sets up an expectation of renewal and new birth, but instead the audience’s expectations are subverted once more. The lovers end up on a beach, a highly erotic location containing the image of

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their half buried bodies crawling with insects. The female has a butterfly, a symbol of 
metamorphosis, on one side of her shoulder and a death-head on the other. The lovers 
switch positions from the painting, but the male still turns towards the female as the 
peasants do in the Angelus. The difference between Wagner’s treatment of lovers in 
Tristan and Buñuel and Dalí’s treatment is apparent here. The lovers do not end up 
together in an otherworldly realm. They end up more like Dalí’s surreal vision of the 
peasants in Millet’s Angelus, a vision highly influenced by Freud, rather than the 
transcendental union of lovers in Tristan and Isolde.

Un Chien Andalou shows a pessimistic view of the possibility for union between 
Eros and Thanatos, one that follows a Freudian rather than a Wagnerian view of the 
relationship. The final image of death underscores the view that the directors adhere to 
towards the conflict between the erotic and death drives, one in which the two drives are 
antagonistic to one another. In the film, Eros is libidinal and unrepressed as evident by 
the expressions of desire on the lovers’ faces and the chase scene that ensues. It becomes 
borderline pornographic as evidenced by the on screen orgasm which turns into a literal 
un petit mort. Thanatos is putrefaction and disintegration which is evidenced by the 
images of rotten donkey carcasses and ants crawling from a hole in a hand. These images 
indicate that the erotic is riddled with guilt and anxiety. Eros and death are always 
antagonistic to each other. Unlike Tristan and Isolde, Eros and death do not unite to 
transcend the earthly realm. Death in Un Chien Andalou is ultimately victorious in the 
battle between Eros and Thanatos.

The filmmakers juxtapose music that communicates an optimistic outlook on the 
Eros and Thanatos conflict with their images which ultimately follows a Freudian rather
than a Wagnerian vision. The music of death and desire, Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* and the two tangos, is used to provide counterpoint to the images of the film. The tango underscores the carnal advances of the lovers, however instead of a dance, an aggressive pursuit ensues. The *Liebestod*, a song of love and death, is timed to coincide with images of solitary deaths, fatalities without the possibility of eroticism, the opposite of what Wagner had in mind in *Tristan and Isolde*.

I will now discuss the second film from these two Spanish filmmakers which continues the pessimistic view of the first, further implicating civilization as an obstacle to the erotic union of lovers. The film continues the use of Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, however, in *L’Age D’Or*, the music enters the story world of the film, allowing the directors to comment on the role of music in the world of the two lovers. Furthermore the arc of two films follow Freud’s evolving views on the individual in society from his pre-War psychoanalytic writings in *The Interpretation of Dreams* to Freud’s final thesis of competing drives in *Civilization and its Discontents*.

**The Golden Age**

Similar to the film that preceded it, *L’Age D’Or* is considered “not only . . . as one of the first innovative uses of sound … but also a revolutionary assault on the viewer.”

Though the film’s title conjures up the image of gold, the precious metal is juxtaposed with human waste. The film is another story of the desire of two unnamed lovers for each other, desire not only thwarted by themselves but also by the institutions of society. Its story represents a “clash between impulse and inhibition.” According to Williams,

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*L'Age D'Or* “tells of the origins and final disintegration of the modern world through the conflation of this world with the ancient Golden Age of myth.”  

The lovers’ story is set against the founding of Imperial Rome, “a bizarre society that, whatever other strange practices it might be able to accommodate, cannot accommodate the union of the two lovers.”

The two years between films in 1928-1930 saw the technological innovation of sound on screen and the “talkies” were born. Though the exact role each played in the film’s development is unknown, it is safe to say that *L'Age D’or* is much more Buñuel’s vision than Dalí’s. Buñuel was one of the first to use music in film in an innovative way. Buñuel’s musical palette is wider here, the soundtrack taken mostly from classical composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Felix Mendelssohn, but he reverts back to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* to score many of the scenes.

Williams provides a brief summary of the film. According to Williams the film:

> . . . begins quite straightforwardly with an apparent documentary on scorpions, moves to narration of an attempted assault by a group of bandits and to another of the founding of a city, then to two lovers kept apart by that city, and finally ending with one of the Marquis de Sade’s favorite characters leaving the scene of an orgy – except that this character looks like Jesus Christ.

*L’Age D’Or* starts in much the same way as *Un Chien Andalou*, with a prologue that seems unrelated to the rest of the film, but which sets up an expectation for the audience. The prologue is composed of previously recorded footage of scorpions used to educate scientists. Like the ants crawling into the hole in the hand in *Un Chien Andalou*,

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30 Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 130.

31 Ibid., 110.

32 Ibid., 111.
scorpions, considered to be symbolic of the genital and anal, are another species of insects that Buñuel and Dalí use to compare with the instinctual lives of humans. Although they did not shoot the footage themselves, Buñuel and Dalí use title cards to comment on the action. This allows them to make subtle hints on what they want the audience to understand about scorpions and hence the film. According to the card “the scorpions have five prismatic articulations, with the sixth being a sac filled with poison. Their pincers . . . are instruments of aggression and information. The scorpion is a lover of darkness which burrows under a rock to escape the glare of the sun.”

The title card is also a way to comment on the structure of the film which will consist of six different sections, the last being filled with the venom that is to be released on the audience.

The Spanish Surrealists were influenced by the entomologist Fabre, who theorized that the female insect kills the male after sex. Fabre’s “austere and terrifying depiction of Eros and Thanatos in nature bears comparison to Sade’s atheistic psychopathia sexualis,” demonstrating the close relationship between sex and death in the act of sadism and in nature. According to Freud, “it is in sadism where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense and yet at the same time fully satisfies the erotic urge.”

The first scene in which the audience finds the lovers, they roll around in a passionate embrace in mud as the city is founded. Their passion plays out in filth, symbolic of the connection between sex and death. This time the symbol of death is excrement, the waste material of life. The first sound of the lovers that we hear is the

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33 *L’Age D’Or*, dir. by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali.
34 Paul Hammond, *L’Age D’Or*, (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 11.
woman’s loud sharp scream of ecstasy, a sound which can easily be confused with the sound of pain. The music from *Tristan and Isolde* is played when the throng pulls the woman away from her lover, not sure if she is being raped or enjoying the sexual escapade in the muck. The use of the overture to *Tristan* is employed when there is distance in between the two lovers, rather than when they come together, providing an ironic counterpoint to the visuals.

The director stops the music often in the film, a technique used to comment on the story of the two lovers. In the scene of the foundation of the city, Buñuel actually stops the music to insert a shot of the woman in the bathroom. The impediment of the progression of the music to show these scatological images mirrors the impediment of the lover’s desire for each other, as if what comes between them and surrounds them is pure filth. The audience hears flushing sounds with a series of cuts of a toilet intercut with shots of molten lava. The directors leave no room for the imagination in terms of what they are depicting.

Buñuel and Dalí make a comment on the nature of man’s aggression as a channel for his unfulfilled erotic desire. When the music returns, we see the man being led away by the crowd, but before he gets very far he escapes in order to kick a dog (perhaps the Andalusian dog never seen in the first film). The next swell of the orchestra is heard at the same time the audience sees a shot of the man rushing towards an insect to smash it with his foot. These random acts of aggression are juxtaposed with the prior shots of lovers inhibited from consummating their desire, exhibiting the dialectic between Eros and Thanatos.
As the film continues, the couple reunites at a party in which the music of the *Liebestod* is played in a concert recital with a conductor and orchestra. Up until this moment, the music is played out of the diegesis (the story world) of the film, but with the use of the orchestra, Buñuel weaves the music into the story. We hear the orchestra tuning its instruments, providing commentary on the story of the two lovers who are out of tune with each other. The lovers meet surreptitiously in the garden while the orchestra plays the *Liebestod* melody. As they move towards each other, the couple is thwarted by its own ineptitude, bumping their heads as they try to clumsily kiss each other on the lips. According to Barlow, “As the concert begins, the music literally stops them from kissing. The same music that underscored their mutual yearning in earlier sequences ends by being the cause of their frustration.”

A statue of Venus plays an important role as a substitute object of desire for the lovers in the garden scene. The role of art in this scene is quite different from the usual role of art which is supposed to ennoble the viewer. The image of the goddess of love hypnotizes the man, though he is hypnotized not by her face but by her feet. The feet are symbolic of the low, lusty urges of the human body taking place below the belt as opposed to the high minded qualities, such as reason and virtue, usually symbolized by the head. In the iconic moment from the film, the woman, while the man is out of the scene, fellates the toe. The camera cuts between a close up of the face of the woman performing fellatio on the toe and a shot of the head of the statue with a blank stare, again juxtaposing the low and the high, the lusty with the virtuous.

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The music stops once again, interrupting the passion to show a scene of the man on the phone on government business. When he returns, the couple embraces and the music returns. An Oedipal scene is played out in voice-over as if we can read the thoughts of the couple, “What joy! What joy to have killed our children!” the woman says as the camera cuts to a shot of the man with blood running down his eye socket repeating the words, “Mon amor.” The scene “has the paradoxical effect of dampening [the lover’s desire]” according to Williams, “only the imagination of murder revives it.” The music reaches its height before abruptly stopping once more.

In another Oedipal moment, the conductor stops the music with what seems to be a headache and walks into the garden. The woman gets up to embrace him, leaving her lover for the father figure conductor. This father figure serves as a symbol of the patriarchal society which usurps sexual gratification from the son in the form of woman, a retelling of Freud’s cultural super-ego. While the male lover walks away in agony over losing the woman, the beating of drums occur which alternate with the Liebestod, heard for the last time.

In the final scene, the filmmakers unleash their venomous poison on the audience. The epilogue in this film, like the one in Un Chien Andalou, seems to be unrelated to the rest of the film but is used to make a bold statement on the action which precedes it. The final scene starts with the beating of the tribal drums and ends with a paso doble. The beating of the drums was chosen by Buñuel as a reminder of a duel between rival drummers who would meet on the Calandand street where he was raised. The duel was so

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37 L’Age d’Or, dir. by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí.

38 Linda Williams, Figures of Desire, 133.
fierce sometimes the skin on the drums was stained with blood. The use of this music demonstrates the Eros and Thanatos dialectic being played out once more in the music. A drum beat by itself is sexually suggestive but a duel using musical instruments which draws blood shows how a relationship between an erotic act and a violent one can exist.

The Eros/Thanatos dialectic is played out in the ultimate act of sacrilege in the final scene. It begins with a title card with a description of a group of “four godless and unprincipled scoundrels who had shut themselves away to engage in the most bestial of orgies.” The depiction involves a reference to the Marquis de Sade’s *One Hundred Twenty Days of Sodom*. We expect the Duc de Blangis, one of the godless scoundrels, to step out of the castle, but instead we get the figure of Christ. The savior of the Christian religion is, in the director’s view, the equivalent to a sadistic misogynist.

The final shot contains an image of women’s scalps hanging from a cross which Hammond argues the “Christian symptom, the images says, is genocidal hatred of women.” This shot is set to a paso doble, a type of music which was originally played at bullfights. The music therefore has associations with extreme violence and gore, showing how skillfully the filmmakers use popular music to comment on the final static image, as it did with the tango in the first film. The scene, according to Short, echoes the “primordial Eros/Thanatos dialectic that has ricocheted through the film.” This final image reaffirms the artists’ vision of the conflict between death and desire. The figure of Christ, the figure who is supposed to provide a resolution for the eternal conflict, is also

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39 *L’Age d’Or*, dir. by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí.

40 Paul Hammond, *L’Age d’Or*, 57.

41 Robert Short, Film commentary, *L’Age d’Or*. 
the cause of it. Unlike Wagner’s transcendental treatment of the lovers’ death, Buñuel and Dalí find no resolution.

*L’Age D’Or*, the second film from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, follows Freud into the abyss of the twentieth century, implicating culture and religion as institutions of civilization which inhibit Eros. In *L’Age D’Or*, however, the relationship between Eros and Thanatos is less antagonistic than in *Un Chien Andalou* and more intertwined. Eros is filthy, as in the images of the two lovers who roll around in what looks like excrement. Eros is painful as seen in the images of the scorpions and the group of sadists which ends the film, a group of sadists that have the figure of Christ as the leader. The force of Eros is strong, so wildly sexual to point in which the images are borderline pornographic as evident in the scene in which the toe of Venus is fellated. Furthermore, in *L’Age D’Or* Eros is transformed into death. In the film a dog gets kicked and insects get smashed underfoot, symbolic of the erotic drive channeled into aggression. However, the forces of civilization are stronger, ultimately separating the two lovers from each other.

Wagner’s music of death and desire is used subversively by the filmmakers as part of the plot, entering the story world from the soundtrack. Initially the filmmakers use it to emphasize the desire the lovers feel, but later in the film it becomes part of the reason for their separation. The patriarch as conductor of the *Tristan and Isolde* opera demonstrates how the institutions of civilization obstruct the erotic drive of the lovers. The popular music pieces in the film, the tribal drums which draws blood, and the paso doble, a type of music associated with a gory bullfight, are used to underscore the Eros/Thanatos conflict taking place throughout the film as well.
During the 1930s, an artist from Italy, Luchino Visconti, moved to Paris and was introduced to the surrealist films of Buñuel and Dalí. Although he had a style of his own, his films, particularly *The Damned*, also show a Wagnerian and Freudian influence. However, it is his film *Death in Venice*, based on the novella by Thomas Mann and featuring the music of Gustav Mahler, which is the best example of how Visconti uses music to treat the theme of Eros and Thanatos in his work.
CHAPTER 2

LUCHINO VISCONTI’S DEATH IN VENICE (1971)

In an interview on his masterpiece *Death in Venice* (1971), the Italian director Luchino Visconti says of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos that “to put the eyes on beauty is to put the eyes on death.”¹ In this film, Visconti demonstrates his mastery in using sound and vision to treat the relationship between love and death, one in which beauty is an essential component. The characters, setting, and the nature of music in the film have both erotic and deathly qualities, each a fusion of Eros and Thanatos. Visconti crafts a film in which all of these amorphous elements create a tension between Wagnerian transcendence and a Nietzschean state of flux. Although Visconti’s comment signifies the importance of vision to the relationship between love and death, it is his use of music in the film which is central to linking Eros and Thanatos together.

Along with Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti is regarded by most film scholars as one of the pre-eminent filmmakers in Italian cinema. Considered by Adam Low to be “a man who has seen everything and understood it all,”² Visconti was born into a wealthy aristocratic Milanese family at the turn of the century. After a successful career racing horses, he moved to Paris in the 1930s where he started his film career as an apprentice to the French director Jean Renoir.

Throughout his life Visconti was closely involved with opera, which had a deep and lasting influence on his work. In addition to his fame as a filmmaker, he is considered to be a world renowned opera director, having directed such vocal performers as the


² Adam Low quoted in *The Life and Times of Count Luchino Visconti*. 
soprano Maria Callas. It wasn’t until 1969 however that he made what is known as his “German trilogy,” a series of films which include *The Damned* (1969), *Death in Venice* (1971), and *Ludwig* (1972), three operatic films in which the music and philosophy of German composers and artists are pervasive. Henry Bacon notes that “like a shadow behind this interest in German culture was Visconti’s fascination with its negation, with its descent into ruthless barbarism.”

Visconti’s love of Wagner, a notorious anti-Semite, affected his choice of subject matter and music for his trilogy. In *The Damned* (a movie he wanted to name *Götterdämmerung* after the Wagner opera), a Nazi SA Officer sings an off-key version of the “Liebestod” at a drunken bacchanal on the Night of the Long Knives before being gunned downed by the SS. In *Ludwig*, a film based on the life of the “Mad King” of Bavaria, Wagner and his music are the subject of the King’s obsession, an obsession which turns into madness and death. In *Death in Venice* a film about an artist who is led to his death by a vision of beauty, the philosophy of *Tristan and Isolde* permeates the film.

Visconti was not only influenced by opera but by literary works of art as well. He adapted many of his films from works of literature with existential themes such as Dostoevsky’s *The White Nights* (1848) and Camus’ *The Stranger* (1942). However it was his reading of Thomas Mann that had the biggest influence on his films. Visconti has said that in one way or another “all of my films are dipped in Mann.” Visconti found a kindred spirit in Mann, an artist who was homosexual like himself. Mann wrote

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4 Ibid., 140.
Death in Venice in 1911 about a homoerotic experience he had when he encountered a young boy while vacationing in Venice, Italy. Similarly, at the time he filmed his vision of the novella in 1971, Visconti was in a relationship with the Austrian actor Helmut Berger, a man forty years younger than himself.

Visconti takes artistic license with Death in Venice, creating visually and musically what Mann has done with words. He omits the first two chapters of the novella, a change he thought was necessary for a proper adaptation from novella to film. However, as scholar Hans Vaget argues, Visconti expected his audience to be familiar with the source material and “clearly intended his film to be viewed and judged in relation to its literary model.” Visconti is known for his exquisite attention to detail and the film is faithful to the novella in many ways. However, the film “relies principally on naturalistic effects and a predominantly realistic story line” instead of attempting a shot for shot visualization of the mythical and psychological source material. It is through his camera work and especially his use of music that Visconti adapts Mann’s story.

Mann’s story is set just a few years before World War I breaks out on the European continent. The narrator describes the general anxiety of the times in one of the first lines, “it was a spring afternoon in that year of grace 19--, when Europe sat upon the anxious seat beneath a menace that hung over its head for months.”

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5 Luchino Visconti quoted in The Life and Times of Count Luchino Visconti.


7 Caroline Joan Picart, Thomas Mann and Friedrich Nietzsche: Eroticism, Death, Music, and Laughter (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 32.

are condensed into the story of the central character in the novella Gustav von Aschenbach. Aschenbach is a prominent writer who, after a series of visions, gets the urge to travel from his hometown of Munich to Venice, Italy. Mann fuses the Apollonian and Dionysian with the North and the South in the description of the traits he inherits from his parents. The fusion is described as follows:

the union of dry, conscientious officialdom and ardent, obscure impulse produced an artist . . . [whose works include] the lucid and vigorous prose epic on the life of Frederick the Great . . . [and an] impassioned discourse on the theme of Mind and Art . . . [which] led serious critics to rank it with Schiller’s *Simple and Sentimental Poetry*.

Aschenbach begins as the model of Apollonian restraint, but, by the end of the novella, his psychological balance is dramatically tipped in favor of the Dionysian as his suppressed desire erupts after seeing a vision of beauty. This lack of balance leads him to his death.

The character in the film is not only an autobiographical vehicle for Visconti, but an amorphous mixture of Mann’s fictitious Adrian Leverkühn from Mann’s *Dr. Faustus* and Gustav Aschenbach from *Death in Venice* as well as the real life Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, and Friedrich Nietzsche. He is at once all of these great artists in one but at the same time he is symbolic of the new twentieth century artist faced with a crisis in his art and life, a crisis which leads to death.

Visconti’s decision to change the profession of the character from a writer to a composer is central to his creative vision. The character’s profession was likely a way to integrate Adrian Leverkühn, the protagonist from *Dr. Faustus* into the story. Written by Mann in 1947, the story is, among other things, an allegory for Germany’s relationship

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9 Ibid., 8.
with National Socialism. Mann recreates the legend of Faust in the story of a composer who makes a pact with the Devil, enabling him to rise to the level of fame of a Beethoven or Wagner. In *Dr. Faustus*, Leverkühn debates the nature of music with his friend and alter ego, Serenus Zeitblom, and has a sexual encounter with a prostitute named Esmeralda from who he knowingly contracts syphilis, an act “steeped in defiance of God and human sentiment, interpreted as the signing of the pact with the devil.”

Visconti weaves both of these episodes into his film and merges aspects of the artist’s sickness into his vision of Aschenbach.

The first and last names of the character Gustav Aschenbach are symbolic. The last name Aschenbach in German means “stream of ashes,” a metaphor for the nature of a character who, along a path towards death, encounters numerous symbols of death. The first name, Gustav, was given to the character by design as well. Mann had met the composer Gustav Mahler and used his physical appearance in sketching out how the character in his story would appear. He was apparently upset about hearing of Mahler’s death and used the name in order to pay homage to the composer. Mahler was also close to the same age as Aschenbach when he died, both having barely passed the age of fifty. However in the novella, this is where the likeness ends since there is little other than physical appearance that links Mann’s Aschenbach with Mahler.

The similarities between the character in the film and the real life composer are too great to ignore. For Vaget, the director’s decision to change Aschenbach’s profession

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12 Ibid.
“leaves little doubt that Visconti was concerned with the real Gustav Mahler.”13 Mahler was deeply affected, almost obsessed by death throughout his life having eight of thirteen siblings die in his youth. He had lost a daughter to scarlet fever and had even famously sought treatment from the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Similarly, in the film Visconti’s Aschenbach has lost a daughter and suffers from a nervous breakdown before traveling to Venice.

Both Mahler and Mann’s works are deeply influenced by Wagner and Nietzsche. Like Visconti, Mann used Wagner’s opera as a motif in his work, having written another short story titled Tristan which includes a scene in which a patient in a sanitarium plays the main motif from Tristan and Isolde on a piano. Wagner and his music are mentioned often in Dr. Faustus, an excellent model on which to base a composer with a dark side. An allusion to the Liebestod is made in Death in Venice as Wagner is known to have written the “seductive and soporific music” in Venice and actually had died there.14

Much of Mann’s work follows Nietzsche’s flux philosophy, what Mark Conard calls “an erasure of opposition.”15 Throughout Death in Venice and Dr. Faustus, Mann consistently intertwines Eros and Thanatos, Apollo and Dionysus, young and old, and good and evil, shedding light on the amorphous nature of characters, the dark side of the city of Venice, and the ambiguous nature of music. The flux between seemingly antagonistic ideas serves as one of the philosophical foundations for Visconti’s film.

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Mann used an apocryphal detail from Nietzsche’s life to shape Leverkühn’s character, an experience which will be hinted at in Visconti’s Aschenbach. Nietzsche’s biography plays a critical role in Leverkühn’s character in Dr. Faustus, most notably in the brothel scene which is based on an episode from Nietzsche’s life. Nietzsche suffered from ill health throughout his life, reportedly contracting syphilis after a liaison with a prostitute, a possible reason for his eventual madness and the cause of his death.

Similarly Mahler was influenced by both Wagner and Nietzsche. Generally thought of as the last composer of the Romantic era, Mahler’s music contains remnants of Wagner’s influence which can be heard in the Adagietto movement of the Fifth Symphony which is featured in the film. Mahler also read Nietzsche’s work and was deeply affected by it. Niekerk considers that the “worldview underlying his first four symphonies . . . the contradictory emotions and shifts from deep desolation to joy as part of the Nietzschean agenda.”

His Third Symphony, the fourth movement which is featured in the film as the product of Aschenbach’s brush with Eros, is based on his reading of Nietzsche.

Desire Projected Itself Visually

Visconti opens up his film with the Adagietto, the fourth movement from Mahler’s Fifth Symphony. As the credits are displayed, the audience is enveloped in the sonorous sound of the music seeming to arise out of darkness. The association between music and the primordial is an idea that will reoccur in the film. The movement is written for strings and harp which help create the elegiac sounds of the orchestra. The

16 Carl Niekerk, Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-De-siècle Vienna (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 85.

17 Mann, Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories, 5.
music “reinforces evocation of desire . . . laden with appoggiaturas, leaning notes, each yearning with melancholy gladness for the next one.”

According to Vaget, “the F-major piece evokes an . . . almost Tristanesque atmosphere.”

The music and the establishing shots of the film set the tone for the somber yet beautiful mood of the film. Out of the darkness comes life in the shape of a boat on the sea coming into Venice. The naming of the boat Esmeralda, the same name as the syphilitic prostitute Leverkühn with whom he has a sexual encounter, incorporates elements from Mann’s Dr. Faustus into the film. It also demonstrates how Visconti links life with death and disease from the first to the last frame in his film.

Visconti places the audience immediately in Venice, a city known for its exquisite beauty, though if the name of the city conjures up this image, the expectation will be subverted in the film. The beauty will eventually turn into decay by the film’s end, going “from splendor to squalor,” as the city hides a terrible secret of a spreading cholera epidemic. According to Bacon, by setting the story in Venice, Mann provided the “necessary counterweight between latinitis and germanitas,” that is between the sensuality of the South in Italy and the cool restraint of the North in Germany. Italy is an important location in Dr. Faustus as well associated with the diabolical, the place where Leverkühn meets the devil. By omitting the first two chapters, and hence any scenes in Munich, Visconti demonstrates that his focus is on the germanitas of the artist’s

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20 Bacon, Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay, 169.

21 Ibid., 140.
personality and the *latinitis* of the geographic area. According to Bacon, “Venice is turned into a metaphor for Western culture . . . the city is relegated to a glorious leisure resort . . . and it appears to be dying of its own filth.”

After Visconti establishes the location, his camera is turned towards Aschenbach, sitting and reading a book, looking quite pensive. For the rest of the film, Venice serves as the backdrop to his internal states of mind. Aschenbach’s facial expressions tell of his inner life. He is a sad, solitary figure. In creating the artist’s mood, Visconti takes his cue from Mann’s portrait of the artist in *Dr. Faustus*. Aschenbach, like Leverkühn in the novel, suffers from a sick soul. The syphilis Leverkühn contracts from the prostitute “becomes a source of years of suffering and death as well as of days, weeks, and months of aesthetic inspiration and creation,” linking Leverkühn’s creative genius with madness. According to Picart, for Mann “the artist is aligned with the decadent and sickly . . . because [he] derives creative power from attraction to death and the primeval passions.” Although Aschenbach does not appear to be mad at the beginning of the film, he does suffer from wild mood swings throughout the film, another polarity that Visconti manipulates.

The *Adagietto*, referred to as a leitmotif in the screenplay, is associated first with Venice and then with Aschenbach. According to Vaget, the music is “meant to expose Aschenbach’s inner orientation towards death.” The music is heard four times in the

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22 Ibid., 162.


film, whenever there is a physical entrance or metaphysical exit. It will later become part of the diegesis of the film and in turn part of the character’s psyche.

Before his encounter with beauty, Achenbach encounters ugliness and old age in the form of a “young-old” man who accosts him as he gets off the ship. He is the first harbinger of death that Aschenbach meets, although not the last. Visconti displays his fine attention to detail in capturing Mann’s description in this scene. He is described in the novella as follows:

. . . an apparent youth [who] is no youth at all . . . he was an old man, beyond a doubt, with wrinkles and crow’s feet round eyes and mouth; the dull carmine of the cheeks was rouge, the brown hair a wig. His neck was shrunken and sinewy, his turned up moustaches and imperial were dyed, and the unbroken double row of yellow teeth he showed when he laughed were but too obviously a cheapish false set.  

In both the film and novella the “young-old man” says to the composer something of an ominous erotic nature, “Give her our love, will you, the p-prettly little dear . . . little sweety-sweety-sweetheart.”  

Although Aschenbach is initially repulsed by the sight of this man, through “cosmetic transmogrification” he will himself become like the young-old man by the end of the film, an example of the amorphous nature of a character who eventually transforms himself into that which repulses him.

The other harbinger of death that Aschenbach meets early in the film is the gondolier. He is dressed almost entirely in black and steers a black gondola, “black as nothing else on earth except a coffin.”  

26 Mann, *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, 17.

27 Ibid., 20.


29 Mann, *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, 20.
seeming to speak in tongues. Like Charon, who steers passengers across the river Styx, he rows Aschenbach into the Lido which becomes a metaphor for the mythological underworld of Hades. When he tells Aschenbach he is a good rower, in the novella Aschenbach thinks to himself: “That is true, you row me well. Even if you mean to rob me, even if you hit me in the back with your oar and send me down to the kingdom of Hades.”

Visconti captures the gondolier’s ominous nature through a series of low-angle shots intercut with shots of the noticeably perturbed Aschenbach seated in the gondola. The sound of the waves and the oar hitting the water help create the threatening mood of the scene. In the novella, Aschenbach thinks that his seat is “the softest, most luxurious, most relaxing seat in the world.”

He has already begun to feel comfortable in his coffin.

Although Visconti does not use voice-over to capture his thoughts, he does capture the metaphorical descent into Hades through the dialogue, the first inclination in the film that there exists another realm outside the physical world. Aschenbach gets into a conflict with the man about their destination and payment for the ride, to which the gondolier portentously replies “The signore will pay.”

He ends up receiving a free ride into the port when the gondolier mysteriously disappears after the boat ride, but ends up paying with his life by coming to Venice.

Much of the film is told in flashback sequences which are necessary to get a sense of the dynamic forces working inside a character who is struggling with the memories of

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30 Ibid., 22.
31 Ibid., 20.
32 Ibid., 22.
his past. Overall there are seven flashbacks which occur during the film. Through them, we are introduced to Aschenbach’s deceased wife and child as well as his musical companion Alfried, who Visconti says should be thought of as Aschenbach’s alter ego. Tonetti considers the Alfried flashbacks “to provide . . . the alter-ego ambiguity of artistic creation which Aschenbach refuses to acknowledge.” Visconti inserts this character into the flashback scenes in the film in order to present Alfried as the Dionysian force in music as opposed to Aschenbach as being overly Apollonian in his artwork. This conflict of Aschenbach’s music being overly Apollonian will recur throughout almost all of the flashbacks until he writes the Dionysian music triggered by seeing beauty.

In the first flashback we encounter Alfried at the piano in Aschenbach’s home in Munich, playing the same melody from Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony* that is heard on the soundtrack which opens the film. The music enters the diegesis of the film and is meant to be thought of as the composer’s music. In a later flashback Alfried plays an excerpt from another Mahler symphony and exclaims to Aschenbach “this is your music!,” connecting the character to the real life Gustav Mahler.

The flashbacks show an artist that is preoccupied with death after having suffered from a nervous breakdown, a man in need of convalescence. While Alfried plays the soothing melody on the piano, Aschenbach sits on a couch looking at an hourglass in which he contemplates his death saying that “the sand runs out only at the end and until it does it’s not worth thinking about it, until there’s no more time.”

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33 Bacon, *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, 163.


36 Ibid.
presented in this scene is similar to Leverkühn in *Dr. Faustus*, who towards the end of his life is overly conscious of the time he has left since the pact with the Devil gives him only twenty four years of his musical genius.

The reversal of roles is another way of blurring the distinction between characters while the discussion of the nature of music further links the artist with the diabolical. Aschenbach has another flashback in which he and Alfried heatedly discuss the nature of music. The idea of the ambiguity of music is extended from the first scene in which the music seems to come out of the primordial darkness. Alfried represents the demonic in art. To him “evil is a necessity, it is the food of genius.” He goes on to say that “art is ambiguous and music the most ambiguous of all the arts . . . [music] is ambiguity made a science.” Picart points out that “the conversations between Alfried and Aschenbach are staged with Alfried taking Leverkühn’s positions on music as systematic ambiguity and primordial a-morality, and Aschenbach taking Zeitblom’s vehement denial of the demonic link between music and genius.” Aschenbach, who appears to be in denial of this nature, “must keep [his] balance,” a balance which will shift in favor of the Dionysian, and hence his death, by the film’s end.

Visconti links Eros and Thanatos by linking his vision of beauty with Aschenbach’s deceased daughter. In his room at the Hôtel des Bains, the composer kisses a photo of his daughter. As Mazzella points out, the girl and Tadzio, the young

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37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.


40 Visconti, *Death in Venice*. 
Polish boy, are both seated with luxurious blonde hair providing a visual simile between the two. By the visual association of the boy with the deceased daughter, Visconti links beauty with death. This linkage suggests that Aschenbach’s love for the boy starts as Platonic, linking him with the composer’s love for his daughter. However, as his obsession grows, his interest will turn into a prurient nature, when the boy is linked to a memory of his encounter with Esmeralda.

As he catches a glimpse of the family around the table, the scene is described as follows:

He noticed with astonishment the lad’s perfect beauty. His face recalled the noblest moment of Greek sculpture -- pale, with a sweet reserve, with clustering honey-coloured ringlets, the brow and nose descending in one line, the winning mouth, the expression of pure and godlike serenity.

The boy is androgynous, both male and female, an erasure of opposition between sex characteristics. In the novella, the boy is compared with Eros: his “head was poised like a flower, incomparable loveliness. It was the head of Eros.” His youth and beauty can be compared to the ugliness of the “young-old man” seen previously on Aschenbach’s entrance into Venice. Visconti captures the boy’s beauty by the slowly moving pans of the camera, the zoom lens and the lack of editing of the shots, all giving the appearance of the camera acting as the eye of the observer.

The Adagietto returns a second time as Aschenbach decides to leave Venice, due to his ambivalent feelings for Tadzio. The return of the music is timed to coincide with his first face to face encounter with the boy on his way out of the hotel, each gazing into


42 Mann, Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories, 25.

43 Ibid., 29.
the other’s eyes. However, a conflict with his luggage forces Aschenbach to stay in Venice. In the novella, a “reckless joy, a deep incredible mirthfulness shook him almost as with a spasm”\(^{44}\) upon hearing the news of his lost luggage and knowing of his opportunity to return to Venice. While in the train station, Aschenbach tries to appear agitated by the news but his expression gives away his feeling of exuberance on learning that he will be able to stay in Venice and resume his growing erotic fixation on the boy. However, this joy is mixed with pain as he watches as a victim of the cholera epidemic which infects Venice succumb to the disease, slumping against the wall of the station.

Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony*, the *Adagietto* which is used for the longest stretch in this sequence, started a new period in the composer’s life. According to Niekerk, the harsh contrasts of the *Fifth Symphony* “suggests . . . [the] philosophical idea of transcendence.”\(^{45}\) Its first movement opens with a funeral march while the last movement ends with a *rondo* signifying the overcoming of suffering. The most recognizable part of the symphony though is the *Adagietto*, music which was conceived as a declaration of love from Mahler to his wife, Alma.

An interesting part of the *Adagietto* which Constantin Floros considers most music scholars to have ignored is “Mahler quotes ‘the gaze motif’ of *Tristan and Isolde* and paraphrases it several times in the middle section of the *Adagietto*.”\(^{46}\) Although some scholars may have overlooked this point, Visconti would likely have been aware of Mahler’s musical reference with his considerable knowledge and appreciation of both

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{45}\) Carl Niekerk, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-De-siècle Vienna*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 114.

composers’ music. In fact, as Irving Singer has noted Visconti’s *Death in Venice* resembles Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* in the way that they both begin . . . “on a ship in water and end with the lover’s death on land.”47 The gaze motif in *Tristan and Isolde* occurs for the first time at the end of Act I of the music drama when Isolde explains that she “failed to wreak her intended revenge on Tristan . . . when [he] looked pitifully in her eyes.”48 It is the gaze that binds Tristan and Isolde in love and death.

Mann stresses the importance of the gaze in his novella when the narrator explains that there is “no relation more strange more critical than between two beings who know each other only with their eyes.”49 Though the obsessed Aschenbach can be considered an unreliable observer, the novella hints that the desire could be requited, “the older man perceived that the lad was not entirely unresponsive to all the tender notice lavished on him . . . their glances met.”50 Visconti captures these furtive glances between the observer and the observed with his camera-eye on numerous occasions, in the large hall, in the hotel lobby, on the elevator, and on the beach. Aschenbach is linked to Tadzio by death and desire, “the camera acts as an erotic go-between, a messenger, an obliging servant as in so many courtly and romantic love stories.”51

When he returns to the Lido, he sees Tadzio on the beach, an encounter with sound and vision which compels him to write. In the novella, the sound of the boy’s


49 Mann, *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories,* 49.

50 Ibid.

name being called out is compared with music, “two musical syllables, something like Adgio . . . with a long-drawn-out u at the end.” When he hears him speak in Polish “the lad’s foreign birth raised his speech to music.” In this scene, the diegetic sounds in the film are as important in creating the aural experience, as Aschenbach can clearly hear Tadzio’s name mixed with the soothing sounds of the sea over the din of voices coming from the beach.

The next scene introduces a new piece of music, not only as part of the soundtrack but also as part of the story world. In this pivotal moment in the film, the Fourth Movement from Mahler’s Third Symphony is heard “creating a magical effect as it emerges from sounds of the beach.” Visconti films Aschenbach picking up a pen and it is assumed that he writes the music that is heard on the soundtrack, a visualization of the composer being swept away by Dionysian forces. The sight of the boy is essential to the novella and film as, “he would write, and moreover he would write in Tadzio’s presence.” In a signature Viscontian shot, the camera captures the boy wrapped in a towel, walking towards the sea looking like the perfect image of beauty, while in the same frame the audience sees Aschenbach penning his song. In the novella Mann describes the inspired writing as being driven by Eros, “never had he known so well that Eros was in the word as in those perilous and precious hours.”

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52 Mann, Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories, 31.
53 Ibid., 42.
54 Bacon, Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay, 170.
55 Mann, Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories, 45.
56 Ibid.
The Third Symphony's aim, according to Bacon, “was to capture Being . . . in all its multiplicity.”\(^{57}\) The first three movements of the programmatic music are entitled “Pan Awakens, Summer Marches In,” “What the Flowers Tell Me,” and “What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me.” The notion of Pan is significant since the Greek god who plays the flute is an avatar of Dionysus, linking the creation of the universe with Dionysian forces. The fourth movement, “What Man Tells Me,” is an awakening to humanity, set to the “Midnight Song” by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Written as a contralto solo, the lyrics are:

O Man! Take heed!
What says the deep midnight?
"I slept, I slept—,
from a deep dream have I awoken:—
the world is deep,
and deeper than the day has thought.
Deep is its pain—,
joy—deeper still than heartache.
Pain says: Pass away!
But all joy
seeks eternity—,
—seeks deep, deep eternity!"\(^{58}\)

In the film, Aschenbach ironically writes his “Midnight Song” in broad daylight. Floros believes that Mahler, and therefore Visconti’s Aschenbach, must have “found several things in the “Midnight Song” that appealed to him: the midnight mood, the idea of eloquent midnight, the awakening from a dream, the dialectic of night and day, pain and pleasure, decay and eternal life, and finally Nietzsche’s interpretation of eternity as a

\(^{57}\) Bacon, *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, 164.

return.” In fact Mahler wanted to call the program “The Gay Science” after Nietzsche’s book with the same name, a book in which he first posits the idea of an eternal return.

The unique quality of Visconti’s audiovisual work is on display in the sequence which starts with his attempt to leave Venice and ends with the composer writing music on the beach. The changes in the music are presented almost as movements: first, the Adagietto, followed by the “Midnight Song” which immediately turns into the next piece of music, a simple but instantly recognizable piece by Ludwig van Beethoven. The use of Beethoven’s Für Elise is appropriate as he is considered by most music scholars to be the first Romantic era composer, the first to have “unchained dark and chaotic forces” with his music. Visconti uses this piece to link Eros and Thanatos once again, linking the image of beauty with sex and disease.

The brothel scene is taken from an episode in Dr. Faustus in which Leverkühn visits a brothel where he knowingly contracts syphilis from a prostitute. Mann had in mind the stories of two of Nietzsche’s visits to a brothel, one of which he wrote about in a letter to Paul Deussen. In the letter Nietzsche recounts an episode in which he entered a brothel unknowingly, banged a couple of chords on a piano and hurried out of the place. The other involves an apocryphal story in which he may have contracted syphilis from a prostitute which caused the mental breakdown which led to his death.

59 Constantin Floros, Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies, 112.
60 Niekerk, Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-De-siècle Vienna, 100.
63 Ibid.
In the scene in the film, Aschenbach initially watches Tadzio play a few bars of the tune on the piano. The sound of the music triggers a flashback to his meeting with a prostitute who plays the same tune on a piano in the brothel where Aschenbach meets her, a “metonymic connection between Tadzio and Esmeralda.” Her name, Esmeralda, the same as the ship which brought Aschenbach to Venice, links her to a beautiful but deadly butterfly, *Hetaera Esmeralda*. The butterfly, an amorphous creature, is described in *Dr. Faustus* as “a lover of dusky, leafy shade . . . whose wings flaunt a triad of vivid color above, but whose underside counterfeits a leaf with bizarre precision.”

In the episode from *Dr. Faustus*, upon entering the brothel Leverkühn describes “the nymphs and daughters of the wilderness, six or seven . . . morphos, clearwings, esmeraldas . . .” Visconti films the women in this “hell hole of lusts” with their legs spread wide open, an enticing sexual gesture which leaves no doubt the reason for Aschenbach’s visit. The sexuality of the brothel can be compared with the sensuality of Venice, its own “hell hole of lusts” for Aschenbach.

The “nut brown lass, in Spanish jacket, with . . . stubbed nose, and almond eyes” is changed in the film to a woman who appears to look eerily similar to Aschenbach’s wife, another way in which Visconti creates fluidity among characters. The brushing of her hand across his face, “a touch that still burned on his cheek,” is a significant gesture.

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64 Bacon, *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, 167.
66 Ibid., 151.
67 Ibid., 152.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 166.
which Visconti makes sure to capture with his camera. In such an erotically charged film, her caress and the subsequent grabbing of his hand after the implied act has been consummated are the only time that the character experiences the sense of touch.

According to Picart, “these associations are meant to be carried over to Aschenbach’s unspoken passion for Tadzio, and help render concrete Aschenbach’s association of the criminality of his dark secret with Venice’s ‘sickness for love of gain.’”

The next flashback triggers the third use of the Adagietto in the film. The music returns with the memory of the death of Aschenbach’s daughter as the baby’s coffin is seen being wheeled away while the grieving parents comfort each other. The funeral of the child foreshadows Aschenbach’s own death. In the next scene he will be dressed by a “Mephistophelian barber who places a rose in his jacket . . . dressing him for his own funeral.” In order to please Tadzio who is now his “idol”, he is made to look like the young-old man whom he first encounters upon reaching Venice by wearing make-up. The Mephistophelian barber tells him “Now the signore can fall in love as soon as he likes.” Aschenbach proceeds to stalk the boy and his family around the streets of Venice, now burning from fires sets to prevent the spread of the Asiatic cholera. These scenes in the film, with Aschenbach, now “hopelessly drunk with passion . . .

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70 Picart, Thomas Mann and Friedrich Nietzsche: Eroticism, Death, Music, and Laughter, 33.

71 Tonetti, Luchino Visconti, 147.

72 Mann, Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories, 69.
visually emphasize the city’s link with death and disease . . .”\textsuperscript{73} Though the sickness is being covered up, Aschenbach now “shared the city’s secret, the city’s guilt.”\textsuperscript{74}

The third use of the Adagietto ends with a final flashback of a dream in which Aschenbach conducts one of his own symphonies which turns out to be a disaster. Interestingly, Visconti replaces the Dionysian dream from the novella in which he hears the Pan flute and the sound of the long drawn out \emph{u} with a dream about Aschenbach’s artistic failure. After the debacle of a performance, Alfried taunts him by saying “Your music is stillborn and you are unmasked.”\textsuperscript{75} From this dream Aschenbach awakens hearing the words of his alter ego Alfried telling him “there is no reason you cannot go to your grave.”\textsuperscript{76}

The final scene takes place on the beach, usually a highly erotic location but this time a sparse and desolate one. A woman singing \emph{Nenia}, a plaintive song by Modest Mussorgsky, introduces the scene. Two young girls dressed in black play in the sand on the empty beach. As Aschenbach walks onto it, the camera catches him in a high angle shot swallowed up by the emptiness on the beach below. Again the reference to sight is important as an abandoned camera is caught on the beach. Mann’s novella describes:

\begin{quote}
. . . the pale and lovely Summoner smiled at him and beckoned; as though, with the hand he lifted from his hip, he pointed outward as he hovered on before into an immensity of richest expectation. And, as so often before, he rose to follow.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} Picart, \textit{Thomas Mann and Friedrich Nietzsche: Eroticism, Death, Music, and Laughter}, 33.

\textsuperscript{74} Mann, \textit{Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories}, 65.

\textsuperscript{75} Visconti, \textit{Death in Venice}.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Mann, \textit{Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories}, 72.
As Aschenbach watches the scene from his chair, his black makeup begins to drip from the top of his head down the side of his face before he breathes his last breathe. According to Tonetti, “beauty, Eros, and Death . . . are coalescing entities . . . [which] unfold on the beach.”

The Adagietto returns for the last time as the beauty enters the water. Singer calls the portrayal of the Summoner as “both Hermes leading outward to oceanic immensities of death and also Eros directing the soul towards an infinite beauty.” In the penultimate image of the film, beauty takes on the form of the mythological character who brings dead souls to Charon to pass into Hades.

The mise-en-scene of the last shot before Aschenbach’s death contains only a few critical visual details. In the frame Visconti captures the beach, the abandoned camera off the center of the frame, the beauty in the center, and in the distance on the water, a boat. The distant boat is a critical visual detail since it ties the last image together with the first, its own eternal recurrence. The music on the soundtrack returns the audience to the first frame in which Eros and Thanatos are united in the sound of music and the images of darkness, the solitary artist and the Esmeralda.

Shookman finds that the Liebestod “may hold a clue as to how Aschenbach perishes.” He compares the smile of the beauty with the smile that Isolde sees on Tristan . . . both as dying in a similar way, in illicit and powerful love. It is unclear whether Visconti implies the same type of transcendent merging that is implied in Tristan and Isolde. The film straddles an imaginary line between Wagner and Nietzsche’s

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78 Tonetti, Luchino Visconti, 149.
81 Ibid.
philosophy. The audience may imagine Aschenbach after “putting his eyes on beauty” entering the underworld of Hades or the fields of Elysium, or perhaps returning to Venice on the *Esmeralda*. In a film in which the main character is an amalgam of so many different people both real and imagined, beauty takes on different forms of death, while the setting changes from splendor to squalor, it is safe to say that the film shows an ever present flux. In a film in which all of the elements metamorphose, it is likely that Visconti wanted the ending to be as ambiguous as the rest of the film.

In *Death in Venice*, Visconti was concerned with Eros and Thanatos not as a battle between aggressive and sexual instincts, but a relationship between them in which beauty plays a central role. Eros in the film is youth and beauty. It is literally personified by a young, beautiful boy. Thanatos is old age, ugliness, disease and decay. However, the relationship is not oppositional. Eros leads to Thanatos, a transformation which occurs not only in the characters but in the setting as well. Like the city is transformed from beauty into decay, Eros in the form of the boy Tadzio leads the composer to his death.

Visconti’s use of the music of Beethoven and Mahler in *Death in Venice* is essential to his treatment of the link between Eros and Thanatos. The music illuminates the Wagnerian and Nietzschean philosophy that undergirds the film. Beethoven’s *Fur Elise* is played by both Tadzio and Esmeralda, metaphorically connecting the two. The possibility of the transmission of disease through illicit sex with Esmeralda is equated with the homoerotic possibility of sex with the young boy. The melancholic *Adagietto*, part of the composer’s psyche, is played whenever there is a metaphysical exit or entrance. This music turns into Dionysian music which the composer writes on the beach
and returns at the end of the film, a scene which leaves open the possibility for transcendence or flux.

Though Visconti was not as concerned with man’s aggressive nature in this film, he was concerned with the changing dynamics in Europe in the twentieth Century which included the eruption of the destructive forces of desire. I will now turn my attention to a film by Stanley Kubrick, an American filmmaker who also showed a fascination with German and Austro-Hungarian culture and the events of the twentieth century. Kubrick reverts back to a Freudian view of human nature, one in which sexual and aggressive drives are central to his films. His choices of music and his technique of scoring his films demonstrate his ingenious method of synthesizing sound and vision, one that he uses to make a statement about not only the twentieth century but our humanity as a whole.
CHAPTER 3

STANLEY KUBRICK’S EYES WIDE SHUT (1999)

The American filmmaker Stanley Kubrick was born in 1928 and died in 1999, the last year before the new millennium. The year of his death is significant, since he lived through almost three quarters of the century, having witnessed enough of its horrors to deeply affect his work as an artist. Of his thirteen films, ten have as subject matter events that occurred in the twentieth century such as World War I, the Cold War and the Vietnam Conflict. While his films treat events in human history, Kubrick explores the dark side of human nature through his characters, especially how and why they turn their dark side on each other or on themselves. In his last film Eyes Wide Shut (1999), he uses musical motifs to signify different conscious and unconscious repressed forces coming into the light of day, in the process creating new associations between Eros and Thanatos.

Eyes Wide Shut was Kubrick’s last film and according to the director his finest.¹ The title of the film is likely taken from a letter written to the director by Franco Zeffirelli who after watching Kubrick’s magnum opus 2001: A Space Odyssey, wrote to him: “you made me dream with eyes wide open.”² 2001: A Space Odyssey is based on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche from his book Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Kubrick uses the musical piece Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Richard Strauss as a motif in the film. Strauss wrote the music as an ode to Nietzsche’s book in which Zarathustra foreshadows the coming of the Ubermensch, a more highly evolved species than our own.

² Ibid., 137.
Eyes Wide Shut has been compared by film scholars to 2001, not as a space odyssey but a sexual odyssey instead. It is based on the short story Traumnovelle, or Dream Story, by Albert Schnitzler, a Viennese author of plays and novellas. The novella was introduced to him by his second wife Ruth Sobotka who committed suicide in 1969. According to Geoffrey Cocks, “Schnitzler, like Freud, saw that behind the stiff conventions of society raged the tumults of love and death within and among people.” In fact Schnitzler’s work was so similar to Freud that the Viennese psychoanalyst referred to Schnitzler as his alter ego. Kubrick has in common with Schnitzler and Freud an interest in unconscious sexual and aggressive forces in human nature. While the two Viennese authors wrote about dark sexual and aggressive unconscious drives, Kubrick films them.

Kubrick updates the story of Schnitzler’s Fridolin and Albertina and the fin-de-siècle world of Vienna they inhabit to his own end-of millennium New York City, the place of his birth. Although the film is relatively faithful to the source material, Kubrick makes a few significant changes to Schnitzler’s novella. After viewing a film descend into utter darkness, the last image leaves the audience with a curious ending, perhaps antithetical to the rest of the film, perhaps not. Kubrick’s last shot contains a reference to the act of sex, an image in which the female is central. Although his main vehicle in exploring the link between death and desire is Bill’s psyche, as Lindwide Dovey puts it, the film “reveals a profound fear of death, where this death is associated with the

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3 Ibid., 138.


5 Patrick Webster, Love and Death in Kubrick, 137.
female.” Although women are depicted in stereotypical roles such as prostitutes and seductresses, they are also depicted as saviors.

It is possible that Kubrick was exploring his own psychosexual fear stemming from Sobotka’s suicide, this film being his most autobiographical. He uses his third wife Christiane’s paintings in the story world of the film and his daughter-in-law as an extra. Kubrick even uses a body double of himself in one important scene as well. His use of actors, a famous married couple in Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, shows his interest in exposing the psychological underpinnings of a relationship. Ciment calls the film an “exploration of the abyss of the psyche in a ‘normal’ adult couple, where, as in all Kubrick’s films, Eros meets Thanatos.”

Kubrick uses visual motifs in the film, specifically the motif of the mirror image and the image of a mask. Both are used as symbols of the unconscious. With the use of these images, the film raises the question about the events of the story being real or a dream, a question that is never fully answered. The film was likely influenced by Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny,” in which seemingly familiar events are fraught with sinister meanings. Kubrick read the essay before filming The Shining (1980), another film which relies on the use of doubles and mirror images. The tendency of Freud’s patients to repeat traumatic events in various forms led him to conceive of the death drive in the first place. Kubrick’s use of doubles, mirrors, repetition, patterns, repression, the familiar and the strange all seem to correspond to Freud’s ideas on The Uncanny, and how "uncanny feelings" stem from man’s repressed instincts.

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Kubrick is widely regarded as an innovator in using music in film, weaving the music into the picture in ways that have never before been heard. As Claudia Gorbman has noted, the music is not so much scored to the film as it is “forges a bond between story world and soundtrack that is . . . like the bond between the two elements that make epoxy glue.”8 When visual images and music are welded together as in Kubrick’s films, each makes the other more potent. In this film, Kubrick weaves together a waltz, jazz standards, and György Ligeti’s Musica Ricercata II, the last piece written as a violent response to the horrors of the twentieth century. Kubrick uses the pre-existing associations in Ligeti’s music to create new associations between Eros and Thanatos in the psyche of his character.

The story of Eyes Wide Shut is set during Christmas and occurs over three days. For each day, Kubrick uses different types of music to help tell the story of a descent into the unconscious mind of his character. During the first night Kubrick uses a waltz and jazz music to signify the surface level of the Harfords lives, whereas at the end of the second night and into the next day, Kubrick uses the piece Musica Ricercata II by György Ligeti to signify Bill’s unconscious mind. The Ligeti piece does not occur until midway through the film. The violent music is a startling contrast to the other pieces in the story world. The piece is played five times during the second part of the film, and each time it “comes at a point in the story of psychological denuding or castration”9 of Bill. Ligeti has said he wrote the music in response to the purges of Josef Stalin who was responsible for the deaths of millions of people in Soviet Russia. In an interview for a

8 Gorbman, “Ears Wide Open” in Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Film, 6.

9 Ibid., 11.
documentary on Kubrick’s life, Ligeti called the piece “a knife in the heart of Stalin.”\textsuperscript{10} Kubrick relies on this association between music and violence in order to make a new association between the music and Bill’s psychosexual fear. The violence heard in the music represents the aggressive unconscious forces both within the character and around him.

\emph{Don’t You Want to Go to Where the Rainbow Ends?}\textsuperscript{11}

The film opens with an elegant piece, a waltz playing on the soundtrack which the director cleverly weaves into the diegesis of the film. The music acts as a framing device for the film, introducing the audience to the conscious, surface level world of the Harfords, a cultivated upper class couple as evidenced by the music they listen to and the lush, colorful paintings that hang from their New York apartment. The waltz is in 3/4 time, a twentieth century modern treatment of a famous art form often associated with Vienna. Instead of a Viennese waltz that was popular in the world of Schnitzler’s novella, Kubrick uses a minor key modern composition by the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, \emph{Jazz Suite Waltz No. 2}. The waltz is a musical union of two art forms, the Viennese waltz and American jazz, another example of how Kubrick synthesizes Vienna and New York. The Shostakovich waltz is an important motif in the film, reoccurring during scenes of Bill and Alice’s mundane life and also returning at the end of the film.

The first image of the film is creatively shot by the filmmaker as an eye opening and shutting, a veritable blink of the eye. Kubrick opens his camera eye to Alice Harford undressing in between two classical columns, framing her voluptuous body as in a

\textsuperscript{10} György Ligeti quoted in \emph{Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures}, DVD, dir. by Jan Harlan (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010).

\textsuperscript{11} \emph{Eyes Wide Shut}, DVD, dir. by Stanley Kubrick 1999 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007).
painting. She is shot from behind while she looks in the mirror, dropping her dress and revealing her statuesque body. The camera eye shuts and the title card appears, *Eyes Wide Shut*. It is possible that by using this image as the first of the film, the director intended the nude female body to be the erotic image. In this film, the nude female body is pervasive, however, Kubrick doesn’t simply make gratuitous use of the nude female form. As Dovey explains the film “concentrates Freud’s two drives, Eros, the erotic drive and Thanatos, the death drive -- onto the female body.”

12 The nude is the erotic image in the film but at the same time it will become associated with death.

Although Alice’s body is the first image of the film, the audience is introduced to Bill soon after. Bill is introduced by a shot from behind in the dark, looking out of the window onto the Manhattan street, an ominous way to shoot the protagonist of the film. Bill is a doctor who is always around women’s bodies and as a result of his profession always close to death. He is a cultured, highly civilized man who is slowly unmasked in the film to reveal the unconscious forces that lie beneath his mask. The opening shots of the film comment on the nature of each of the characters, one in which their lives seem to be superficial.

With the use of mirrors in the film, Kubrick establishes the idea of the double, a visual motif in the film. In the beginning of the film Bill is depicted as rather narcissistic, looking at himself in the mirror rather than his wife while they get ready in the bathroom. When Alice asks him how she looks, he doesn’t bother to look at her, but looks at himself in the mirror instead. The act of looking is important to the story as it

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12 Dovey, "*Eyes Wide Shut: Kubrick and Representations of Gender,*" 177.
will be through looking that Bill experiences Eros and Thanatos. However, equally important is the act of hearing.

The music in the first part of the film, especially the graceful Shostakovich waltz, belongs to the surface world of the Harfords. As they get ready to leave for their Christmas cocktail party, the director captures one important detail, Bill turning off the stereo system in the room. The waltz believed to be on the soundtrack is in fact coming from the story world. This is the Harford’s music: they listen to waltzes, go to glamorous cocktail parties, but have no clue about their secret desires which are unknown even to themselves. These desires are hidden in their unconscious minds but will eventually “rise into reality” during the course of the film.

Their seemingly perfect marriage begins to unravel the night of the cocktail party. Kubrick changes this event from a masquerade ball in the novella, an event during the Carnival season in which everyone wears a mask. Taking place in their wealthy friend Ziegler’s beautiful mansion, jazz standards such as “It Had to Be You,” “Chancon D’Amour,” and “I’m in the Mood for Love”, are played by the band. The party goers dance to the graceful jazz music, the music of lovers. Alice dances with a debonair Hungarian man who tries to seduce her with a discussion of Ovid’s *Art of Love* while Bill flirts with two beautiful models, Gayle and Nuala who want to take him to “where the rainbow ends.” The two models represent another use of the double image in the film. They are intertwined, arms wrapped around each other. They appear serpentine, tempting Bill to break the bond of his marriage with their overt flirtations.

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Love is not the only thing in the air at the cocktail party. While they both allow
themselves to get swept away by their seducers, the mood is overshadowed by the
possibility of death when Bill is called away to come to the aid of a woman. The woman,
Mandy, is referred to as a prostitute and a drug addict by Ziegler who is having sex with
her at the time of her overdose. She is shot in the nude, the first nude body that Bill sees
in the film. Her body, however, is initially limp and lifeless and will become the image
of death in the film. Bill inspects her body and helps bring her back to consciousness,
telling her she’s “lucky to be alive,” a phrase that will repeat in the film.

Critic Tim Kreider’s explanation of the film provides some social context.
Kreider comments on filmgoers expectations to see a film about sex but he insists that
“the real pornography is the depiction of the shameless, naked wealth of end-of-
millennium Manhattan, and of the obscene effect of that wealth on the human soul, and
on society.” The film is replete with images of Bill’s money which is underscored with
the name given to the character as well as the first lines “Honey have you seen my
wallet?” Wealth is always in the background of the film, especially at the lavish
Christmas party given by Ziegler. Bill is seen often in the film pulling out his wallet,
offering to overpay for services rendered. The director perhaps wanted to comment on
what he saw as the decadence of New York at the end of the millennium, a society
similar to the Vienna of Schnitzler and Freud.

Also notable is Kreider’s claim that the many women in the film are all
representative of one. Kreider argues that the film is about the sexual exploitation of

women by the elite class of end of Millenium Manhattan society. He claims that Mandy and Alice are images of each other. Wife and prostitute exist as one, each a commodity which can be purchased. There are many similarities between the Alice and Mandy which Kreider points out. Both are redheads, both take a drug, and both are “fucked by hundreds of men.”

However, the novella is more explicit about the women as psychological projections of the character’s mind than Krieder’s sociological explanation. In the novella, Fridolin tells his wife that “it was always you I was looking for” when he was speaking of other women. In another instance he finds a dead body and believes that it looked like Albertina. The passages in the novella point to a psychological explanation for the women in the film, one that straddles the line between the additional characters being real or imagined.

Thomas Nelson has suggested the couple resembles a New World Adam and Eve. Although he claimed not to believe in any monotheistic religion, Kubrick does use imagery from the Judeo-Christian tradition in his films. The lush paintings of the Harfords’ apartment give off the look of a garden, they are both tempted by others in the film, and Alice dreams of “fucking in a garden,” all evidence of the Old Testament imagery in the film.

15 Kubrick, *Eyes Wide Shut*.
18 Webster, *Love and Death in Kubrick*, 60.
Kubrick’s use of the song “They Did a Bad Bad Thing” though is a musical indication of the Judeo-Christian imagery. The couple returns home to have sex after the cocktail party, the act taking place in front of a mirror. Alice can be seen shaking her hips to the music implying that the music might be coming from the story world. The song’s implication of the idea of original sin underscores Nelson’s assertion that Alice and Bill are a New World Adam and Eve. The song implies that the couple through the act of sex, “the bad bad thing” that they do, eat of the proverbial fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Old Testament act of sin is another indication how the link between Eros and Thanatos. The erotic act of sex is the Judeo-Christian tradition is the act which induced a fall from Grace.

The Password is . . . Fidelio

The next day starts with a montage of a day in the life of the Harfords. The montage shows Alice and Bill going about the events of their life, Bill examining a woman’s body whose breasts are exposed, cut between shots of Alice dressing their daughter Helena and herself. The Shostakovich waltz played during the montage demonstrates that this is the music of their quotidian lives. While the events of the day are set to the Shostakovich waltz, a literal waltz through their lives, at night they become unmasked for the first time in the film. The Ligeti piece becomes the music of the night and of Bill’s unconscious.

Alice is the first to unmask herself that night when they get into a heated argument about the difference between male and female desire after taking a drug together. Alice questions whether Bill “happened to fuck those two models the night before.” The word “fuck” is used often in the film, underscoring the libidinal urges of

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19 *Eyes Wide Shut*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick.
the characters and the aggressive nature of the sex act rather than an act of making love. According to Cocks, “beneath the apparently smooth surface of the marriage lie the turbulent seas of desire and aggression.” Bill is on the surface secure about his wife’s fidelity. He tells her “women . . . they basically don’t think like that” to which Alice responds “if you men only knew . . .” She is the first to confess that she had thoughts about and wanted to act on her libidinal desires with a naval officer she saw while on vacation with Bill.

Eyes Wide Shut is like the Tristan legend in that it is also a story about infidelity. As a result of her confession, Bill goes on a sexual odyssey through the New York night unable to get the thought of another man touching his wife out of his head. Bill begins to think of having his own sexual encounter in retribution for what his wife has revealed. This is “the sword between them” as Fridolin says in the novella, a line which is an allusion to the Tristan and Isolde legend. The symbol of the sword links desire with aggression in the legend and the novella. Bill is so infuriated at his wife that he could kill her but instead decides to have an erotic encounter instead. Kubrick captures Bill’s intense feelings by an insertion shot of Alice having sex with the naval officer which Bill plays over in his mind.

The audience is never sure if the events that occur during Bill’s eventful night are a dream or are reality. Martin Scorsese has commented that the shots of night-time New York looked like “the streets of Manhattan . . . but in a dream.” Kubrick maintains this

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20 Cocks, Wolf at the Door, 140.
21 Schnitzler, Rhapsody: A Dream Novel, 3l.
ambiguity between dream and reality throughout his film. As he roams the streets of Manhattan, the “street signs such as “EROS,” “Pink Pussycat” and XXX Videostore light up foreshadow[ing] and comment[ing] on the action.”

Each of Bill’s potential erotic encounters in New York night will be associated with death. His erotic encounters start with Marion, a patient’s daughter, who reveals her love for Bill in the room in which her father’s recently dead body lies. Bill’s nocturnal journey into the New York night continues with him being accosted by a group of college students who accuse him of being a “faggot.”

One of the students acts aggressively to Bill, bumping him into a car parked on the street. The students not only question Bill’s sexuality and his masculinity but threaten Bill with the possibility of death. Finally he meets Domino on the street, a prostitute who will take him back to her apartment where African masks hang from her bedroom walls. Domino will turn out to test positive for HIV, as revealed to Bill through her roommate Sally the next night. In fact, all of the scenes will become mirrored in the events of the next day and night, further linking the erotic with death and aggression.

Kubrick places a dead ringer for himself in the scene in which Bill meets his pianist friend Nick Nightingale who reveals to him the password to a secret orgy. The use of a body double is a self referential move on the director’s part which demonstrates the self exploratory nature of the film. The place where Nightingale plays is called the Sonata Café. The use of cafes in the film is another way that Kubrick connects New York with Vienna, a city known for its cafes. His body double, a gray bearded man who

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23 Kreider, ”Review: Eyes Wide Shut,” 42.

looks to be around seventy years old, can be seen sitting behind Bill speaking with two women. Although Kubrick has used self referential characters in his films before, specifically the character of the director in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) who films soldiers at War, he has never appeared in one of his own films. It is a small detail in the film, but one that provides a good example of how the film is in some way autobiographical.

In the cafe scene, the music of Beethoven is significant, although his music is not heard but only mentioned. Bill learns the password to a secret orgy in which he will need a mask to enter. The password is “Fidelio” a nod to Beethoven’s only opera and also a play on the word fidelity, the security with which he lacks with his wife causing Bill to go on his sexual odyssey in the first place. Fidelio is the name used in Beethoven’s opera by Leonore, the wife of Florestan who, disguised as a prison guard rescues her husband from his death while he is being imprisoned. It is an opera which has a deep Christian philosophical message of redemption and one that ends with a hymn to conjugal love\(^25\), a philosophy which Kubrick incorporates into his film.

Bill’s arrival at the orgy at the Somerton House indicates a significant shift in the mood of the film, one in which Eros turns into Thanatos. Kubrick creates a highly erotic scene made terrifying by the atmosphere created by the music and the masks. Each participant wears a disguise that hides their true selves, one that at the same time reveals the frightening unconscious aspects of the participants’ psyches. The director chose for the scene Venetian masks: Venice, the place of eroticism and mercantilism\(^26\). In the novella Fridolin watches the events of the orgy and comments that “the delight of


\(^{26}\) Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside an Artist’s Maze*, 270.
beholding was changed to an almost unbearable agony of desire.”

He is warned by a mysterious woman that he could be exposed as a charlatan and that their lives would both be in danger.

Ciment has noted that the length of the orgy scene is the same as the cocktail party. The scene is roughly eighteen minutes in length, another use of the idea of a double in the film. After he is detected to be an imposter, Bill is escorted to a room where he passes a corridor with dancers eerily similar to the cocktail party. As Bill enters one corridor, a jazz number “Strangers in the Night” plays on the soundtrack reminiscent of the music of the cocktail party. The major difference between the two scenes is that in this one everyone here is masked.

Before Bill is summoned to “come forward,” in a style of a Grand Inquisition, the Ligeti piece is timed to a close-up of his mask, an indication that the piece is associated with Bill’s unconscious. The music by Ligeti is sinister, a musically minimal piece which provides a stark contrast to the music that precedes it. Only a total of three notes play for most of the duration of the piece. The contrast of two notes played a half step apart in one octave is moved by the pianist into both a lower and higher octave simultaneously, creating an ominous mood. This semitone interval has been used in other films scores with frightening effect, such as John Williams’ score in Jaws, but the Ligeti piece is more intense, as is to be expected considering the composer’s intentions for writing the piece.

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27 Schnitzler, Rhapsody: A Dream Novel, 76.
One of the ways Kubrick has mastered the art of film scoring is the precision in which he finds this worst moment, the moment of greatest psychological fear.²⁹ Gorbman believes that the use of this piece in Kubrick’s film is unlike anything we have heard before from him, taking “rigor to edit a three minute sequence to a piece with such a distinctive sound.”³⁰ After a repeating pattern of two notes, unsettling the audience with its dissonance, one final murderous note is delivered at the greatest point of anxiety for Bill. The dynamics used for the final note is written for the pianist to be played sforzando. Although it is not unusual to play a piece with force, what is unusual is that the sheet music requires the pianist to play with the force of two fingers instead of one. This is the knife in the heart of Stalin, plunging deepest. The result is that the tyranny and terror of Stalin is met with equal force in the feeling of the music which in turn intensifies Bill’s psychological terror felt on the screen.

The music accentuates Bill’s initial fear during his slow, lugubrious march to the center of the ceremonial circle. Kubrick meticulously composes the visual images of the multi-colored and grotesquely shaped Venetian masks which encircle him, cutting between shots of five or six masks in one frame. When Bill reaches the center of the circle, he is asked for the password. When he cannot deliver the correct password, the high priest asks him to “kindly remove [his] clothing.”³¹ Bill is threatened with both physical and sexual violence when the man tells Bill if he won’t remove his clothing they

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³⁰ Ibid., 11.
Bill’s fear of the removal of his clothing, a psychological denuding, stands in contrast to the rest of the film in which women’s bodies are on display throughout. In a film in which the nudity of the female body is erotic, Bill’s removal of his clothing is associated with the threat of death. In the novella, however, it is the removal of his mask which causes him the most anxiety. For Fridolin, “it seemed a thousand times worse to be the only one unmasked amongst so many that were, than to stand suddenly naked amongst people who were dressed.”

The expiation scene is another example of the Judeo-Christian imagery of the film. Bill has sinned and must pay for it with the humiliating act of removing his clothes. The music intensifies for the audience the sense of fear of the possibility of rape or murder before the mysterious woman who he saved earlier in the film appears to redeem him. Bill’s redeemer appears on a balcony while the camera quickly zooms in and up to her. In a reversal of events, the woman who he saves from an overdose the night before is now saving him. The Ligeti piece momentarily stops and starts again as the woman is taken away by a masked man with a huge ominously shaped bird beak. The possibility exists that Bill is redeemed by the mysterious woman’s sacrifice of her body to the men of the orgy.

After he is allowed to leave the premises unharmed Bill returns home to wake Alice from a dream. Alice’s dream replicates the events of the orgy. She tells him the content of her dream that she was “fucking other men . . . so many . . . and I wanted to

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32 Ibid.

make fun of you, to laugh in your face and so I laughed as loud as I could.”34 Kubrick makes another change from Schnitzler’s novella in this scene. In the film Alice dreams of being a part of an orgy whereas in the novel, Albertina tells Fridolin that she saw him being crucified. In the novel, she tells him that she hoped “he would at least hear [her] laughter when they were nailing [him] to the cross.”35 Both being a part of an orgy or watching the character being crucified are aggressive acts but Kubrick may have omitted the crucifixion from Alice’s dream to concentrate on the act of unrestrained unconscious sexual desire in the character. In this case, the dream sends Bill back out to seek erotic fulfillment as vindication for knowledge of his wife’s unconscious desires. The film’s fade to black indicates the end of the second day.

Life Goes on Until It Doesn’t, But You Know That36

The Ligeti piece dominates the surreal soundscape of the film on the third day. With this music Kubrick takes us into the nether regions of Bill’s psychological anxiety. The music is only heard when Bill is alone or followed, each time when he learns of some deathly news. The use of the music underscores that idea that this is the unmasked Bill not the sophisticated Bill of the first part of the film. Still furious over his wife’s perceived transgressions, Bill is determined to find out more about the mysterious woman, but also attempts to retrace his steps from the previous night in hopes of consummating an extra-marital affair to take revenge on his wife.

Ligeti’s piece returns for the second time when he returns to the site of the orgy in broad daylight to find the gate is locked. No longer does Bill find the promise of the

34 Ibid.


36 *Eyes Wide Shut*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick.
eroticism of the orgy but in its place the threat of death signified by the music and a threatening letter. Kubrick times the return of the music to coincide with the noise of his car engine dying. Instead of being a spectator as he was at the orgy, Bill is now being watched. He sees the security camera watching him while the director’s camera uses the gate to frame him as if he is imprisoned. A strange looking man who seems to already expect him drives up to the gate and hands him a letter to “give up your inquiries . . . and consider these words a second warning.” The note played sforzando is struck repeatedly as he receives the letter.

Perhaps the most terrifying moment of the film is when Bill is followed by a strange man after he leaves Domino to which he returns in search of another erotic encounter. Instead of Domino Bill finds her roommate Sally who, as a tall redhead, looks strangely similar to his wife. After learning from her that he almost slept with a woman who has tested positive for HIV, Bill leaves the apartment looking mortified. In this scene, Kubrick links a visual of the erotic, a sign for a store called “A Hint of Lace,” with the image of death. A stocky bald Grim-Reaper like man in a tan overcoat seems to come out of nowhere to follow Bill through the streets. The ominous note of Ligeti’s music is struck at the exact moment the man comes around a corner, his footsteps can be heard as he follows Bill around the corner creating a palpable feeling of fear for Bill and for the audience.

Bill enters a café to escape the man, a scene in which the audience can hear Mozart’s Rex Tremendae from his Requiem in the story world of the film. No longer does the film contain the elegant waltz or jazz music but instead it contains literally the music of death, a piece the Austrian composer was composing when he died. Once he

37 Ibid.
enters the café, he reads in the paper of an ex-beauty queen having overdosed. The title of the newspaper reads “Lucky to Be Alive,” a repetition of the words he spoke to Mandy two nights before. Bill learns that Mandy has overdosed, but he is unnerved at the thought that it could have something to do with the events of the orgy. The Ligeti piece returns once again as he starts to acknowledge his own part in her death.

Krieder claims that Bill is “implicated in the exploitation and deaths in the film.” All of the erotic encounters he has in the first part of the film are now associated with death. The gay clerk who flirts with him at the hotel tells him that Nightingale may be in serious danger, Domino has been revealed to be HIV+ by Sally, and Mandy is in a morgue. In each of these cases, Bill is partially culpable. He is part of the reason for Nightingale’s bruise on his face and he had a noticeable desire for the women, all potentially projections of his wife, who he now “hated more than he ever loved.”

Bill’s visit to Mandy’s dead body in the morgue is what Dovey sees as “represent[ing] the limits of female objectification by men – the female object becomes the dead object.” The eroticism of her body, in one scene, lifeless, in another vibrant is now taken over by rigor mortis. Schnitzler’s novella clearly connects the vision of the mysterious woman with Albertina. In the novella, Fridolin looking at the corpse asks “was it her alluring body that just yesterday he had felt such agonizing desire.” In Schnitzler’s novel, Fridolin had “pictured the suicide, whose face he didn’t know as having the features of Albertina. In fact he had now shuddered to realize that his wife

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39 Schnitzler, Rhapsody: A Dream Novel, 114.
40 Dovey in Rhodes, "Eyes Wide Shut: Stanley Kubrick and the Representations of Gender," 179.
41 Schnitzler, Rhapsody: A Dream Novel, 158.
had constantly been in his mind’s eye as the woman he was seeking.” Bill’s erotic adventures end up in seeing the dead woman, a projection of his wife.

The final scene in which the music is played when Bill returns home after Ziegler explains to him that Mandy’s death was an accident. “Life goes on until it doesn’t,” he explains to Bill. The scene cuts to a shot of the mask lying on the pillow next to his wife as the Ligeti piece starts on cue, underscoring the idea that the music is associated with Bill’s mask. The mask is a metaphor for the facade of his relationship with his wife, a mask which has now been removed. He breaks down and confesses to his wife, saying to her “I’ll tell you everything.” The recurring note, in which the tension of the events of the last two nights can be heard, is sounded for the last time before his confession.

No Dream is Entirely Just a Dream

The next morning, in the final image of the film, Bill and Alice take their daughter Christmas shopping while they talk about their marriage. The location of the store is important, as Cocks has noted, FAO Schwartz, the toy store is originally from Vienna, another indication that Kubrick wanted to link his story with the one from the novella. Alice and Bill discuss the nature of events calling into question “whether it was real or just a dream.” As Alice decides that they should be grateful for the experience and must go home to “fuck,” the music of the Shostakovich waltz returns to the screen. After his confession and relief from guilt, the only thing left is to unite in the most life affirming way possible, through the act of sex.

42 Ibid., 152.

43 Eyes Wide Shut, dir. by Stanley Kubrick.

44 Cocks, Wolf at the Door, 147.
It is unclear whether Kubrick intended the last image to be seen as being filmed by an optimist or a pessimist. The ending is a curious way to end the film, a return to the vulgar language and libidinal desires of the sexual act instead of the act of making love. The act of sex is seemingly the opposite of how *Tristan and Isolde* ends. The Wagner opera ends with the act of death in which Isolde is transfigured, allowing the lovers to transcend the earthly realm together. Kubrick’s film ends with the act of sex instead of death, a life affirmiting act in which the female body is central. However, as Kubrick’s films have shown, there is no life affirmiting act that does not at the same time contain the shadow of death.

*Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick’s final film, provides us with an example of how a filmmaker at the end of the millennium uses music to treat the relationship between Eros and Thanatos. The erotic image in the film is a woman’s body, however, a woman’s body is also the image of death. Eros is the seduction the married couple undergoes as well as the temptation that accompanies the seduction. Thanatos in the film is the threat of aggression which occurs when Bill is pushed into a car and called a “faggot” as well as when he is threatened with rape and humiliation during an orgy. It is also the possibility of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease through an erotic encounter. Thanatos is literally personified as a stocky bald man who wears a tan overcoat.

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, death is the dark underside of Eros. The lingerie shop sign is filmed in the same frame as the stocky bald man. On the surface, Mandy’s body is erotic, but it also turns up dead. On the surface, sex with Domino is erotic but she turns out to be HIV positive. The erotic orgy turns into a trial in which death is a possibility.
Wherever Eros exists, so does the imminent possibility of death or aggression which seems to shadow the erotic.

The use of music in the film aids in showing the stark contrast between the conscious and unconscious mind, a representation of unconscious forces coming to the light of day and returning to the dark region of the mind from where they originate. The use of the waltz and the jazz music at the beginning of the film underscore the elegant world of the Harfords conscious lives whereas the Ligeti piece represents the violence and aggression that takes place underneath the mask of civilization that Bill wears.

The return of the waltz at the end provides an ending frame to the film, an ambiguous conclusion which seems to imply that Bill and Alice return to wearing their masks, perhaps with their eyes still wide shut instead of wide open. For a film completed in the last year of the century, *Eyes Wide Shut* is the work of a director who follows an eerily similar view of human nature compatible with the fin-de-siècle world of Freud and Schnitzler, a film which shows dark and chaotic forces underneath the mask that people wear, where death seems to lurk around the corner from Eros.
CONCLUSION

Stanley Kubrick’s last film in 1999 brings us back to where we started our discussion -- with the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud written almost one hundred years before in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Having traced the dialectic between Eros and Thanatos through the works of Kubrick as well as three other filmmakers, Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, and Luchino Visconti, I have focused on their use of pre-existing classical music of German and Austro-Hungarian composers to create a dialectic between Eros and Thanatos in their films. In each case the music coupled with the visual images of the film help to illuminate a Freudian, Nietzschean, or Wagnerian view of this relationship.

What can be said about the century as a whole which saw some of the most devastating acts of violence yet also an incredible amount of creativity in the art of filmmaking and the study of the psyche? Each film in this study has relied on the music, literature, philosophy and psychology of Austria and Germany. However, each film is a product of its own time, its own unique creation, a reflection of the new knowledge coming from the field of psychoanalysis as well as a reflection of the devastating events of the century. Each filmmaker’s influence can easily be traced to one or more of the German or Austrian predecessors, but at the same time each filmmaker has a unique vision due to his own personal experiences living through the events of the twentieth century, a vision which he shares with the audience through his artwork.

The films in this study would perhaps never have been made without the publication of Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams. The date of publication of this text in 1900 and the date of the film Eyes Wide Shut in 1999 are important since they essentially
mark the beginning and end of the century. Each of these texts helps to frame the century. The publication of this text as well as Nietzsche’s death in the same year serves as a marker for the beginning of the century while the release of *Eyes Wide Shut* in 1999, for the purpose of this study, can be viewed as a marker for the end of the century. Within this framework the polarity between Eros and Thanatos is evident through the creativity in psychoanalysis and film and the acts of destruction in the historical times which include among other travesties two World Wars.

As these texts serve to frame the century, the music serves as a framing device for the films. The use of the music in the films allows the filmmakers to create new meanings through the juxtaposition of music with the artists’ images of Eros and Thanatos. In *Un Chien Andalou* the tango begins and ends the film. In *Death in Venice* the Mahler *Adagietto* provides the entrance and exit music from the film while in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the Shostakovich waltz pulls us into the film world and leads us out of it. In each case, the ending frame of the motion picture returns the audience back to the beginning.

Within this frame, we have seen erotic images and in each case these erotic images have been opposed by images of death, each film concluding with a final image of death or a reference to the act of sex. In *Un Chien Andalou* and *L’Age D’or* we have seen two stories of unnamed lovers who cannot consummate their desires, desires which are thwarted by either themselves or the forces of civilization around them. In *Death in Venice* we have witnessed the story of a composer Aschenbach and his obsession with a beautiful boy Tadzio. In *Eyes Wide Shut* we have followed the story of the relationship

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between Dr. Bill Harford and his wife Alice, a story that leads us into the depths of Bill’s unconscious. The last film unlike the others ends with a reference to sex but perhaps is the most ambivalent of them all.

In *Un Chien Andalou* images of Eros and death have ranged from an eye being slashed with a razor, ants crawling from a hole in a hand, an on screen orgasm which looks like a literal *petit mort*, books turning into guns, and the half buried bodies of lovers on a beach. In *L’Age D’or* we have seen lovers rolling around in mud which appears to be fecal matter, the thought of murder creating joy amongst lovers, and Christ looking very much like the sadistic Duc des Blangy. In *Death in Venice* we have seen a melancholic composer arrive in Venice on a ship and after seeing beauty reach his final destination of death in the same place where he landed. In *Eyes Wide Shut* we followed Dr. Bill Harford on his erotic journey through Manhattan, a journey which also threatened him with violence.

In each film the location has been important to telling the story of the characters and in some cases, the location possesses its own erotic and deathly qualities. In *Un Chien Andalou* the lovers meet on the streets of Paris and end up dead on a beach. Imperial Rome, the symbol of civilization in *L’Age D’or*, helps keep the lovers apart. Venice, usually a site of eroticism, disintegrates into pestilence and death in *Death in Venice* while the streets of New York, eerily similar to the streets of Vienna one hundred years before, offer up erotic encounters which at the same time threaten sexual violence and death.

The use of musical motifs was an important factor in creating the motion pictures, making the images more potent with their reoccurrence in the films. In the first two films
the motif of Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* served as counterpoint to the story of the two lovers. In *Death in Venice*, Gustav Mahler’s music helped the audience understand the relationship between Eros and Thanatos taking place within the psyche of the composer. In *Eyes Wide Shut* the Ligeti piece presents an audible representation of Bill Harford’s psychosexual fear.

In three of the four films the music has not only been added to the soundtrack but also has entered the diegesis of the film. In *L’Age D’Or* the music of *Tristan and Isolde* starts out on the soundtrack but ends up in the story world becoming part of reason for the separation of the two lovers. In *Death in Venice*, the music we hear on the soundtrack enters the world of the story, becoming the music written by Aschenbach. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the Shostakovich waltz goes from the soundtrack to become the music of the Harford’s conscious lives. The music not only enters the story world but also becomes associated with the unconscious of the characters in the film. Aschenbach writes his Nietzschean composition on the beach, a moment when the Dionysian forces erupt inside him while Ligeti’s violent piece becomes associated with Bill’s unconscious mind.

Each film presents a scene, multiple scenes, or entire picture of surrealism. In *Un Chien Andalou*, the entire picture is told in the same manner as a dream. In *Death in Venice* Aschenbach wakes from a dream hearing the words “now you can go to your grave,” while most of *Eyes Wide Shut* walks the line between dream and reality, one in which the audience is never sure which is which. The dream world of these films demonstrates the filmmakers’ belief that the exploration of the unconscious is critical to providing a key to the Eros/Thanatos conflict.
As we moved through the films, the music has generally followed a path from the neo-Romantic composition of Wagner, to the Modernism of Mahler, to the contemporary music of Ligeti. Death can be heard in each one of these pieces from the chromatic strains of Tristan, to the elegiac sounds of Mahler’s Adagietto, to the violence of Ligeti’s Musica Ricercata II. The classical music from the Romantic era became increasingly more abstract as can be heard in the films in this study. Although each piece has its own Eros/Thanatos dialectic inherent to them, the sounds of death in Wagner’s Liebestod are much more sonorous compared than the violent sounds of Ligeti’s Musica Ricercata II, following a trend in increasing violence in the twentieth century.

Although the Eros/Thanatos dialectic exists only in the human psyche, a similar relationship exists not only in the music but also the visual art objects in the films as well. For instance, Vermeer’s Lacemaker and Millet’s Angelus each had for Dalí a violent aesthetic power which he exploits in the film. In addition to this, Buñuel called Un Chien Andalou “a desperate plea to murder.” Art as an expression of the psyche of the artists metaphorically illustrate the psychic battle between instincts.

Each film presents gender differently, each having its own mix of Eros and Thanatos. In Un Chien Andalou and Eyes Wide Shut, women are portrayed as having similar desires to men. The unnamed woman in Un Chien Andalou throws down the Lacemaker book and looks desirously at the window for her lover. Alice in Eyes Wide Shut has fantasies and dreams about having sex with other men aside from her husband. Women are presented in the last two films as prostitutes who offer erotic encounters but at the same time are stricken with sexually transmitted diseases. Although women are presented as potentially transmitting diseases through sex, they also have the ability to
redeem men, but at the expense of their bodies. For Mandy this means death, for Alice this means sex. Men are not treated any better in the films. Although they are presented as having professions such as doctors and composers, they are also presented as potential rapists as in *Un Chien Andalou*, or potential pedophiles in *Death in Venice*. Men such as Aschenbach who wears make-up to disguise himself are presented as wearing masks, whereas in *Eyes Wide Shut* everyone wears a mask which hides their true selves.

The films often subvert the traditional Christian theological promise of eternal life, one that promises the ultimate victory of life over death. In *L’Age D’Or* the last image of the women’s heads hanging from a cross or Alice and Mandy’s redemption of Bill through their bodies in *Eyes Wide Shut* is more than just an act of sacrilege in art. The films not only comment on the artists’ ability to subvert the traditional religious Christian father/son model of redemption but they also comment on the inability of religion to offer a solution for the artists to the eternal conflict between Eros and Thanatos.

Each picture is undoubtedly a vehicle for self expression by the artists. The filmmakers had to grapple with their own desires and their own mortality which they express through their art. Visconti’s choice of characters, a homosexual artist like himself shows the autobiographical nature of his film. Buñuel, Dalí, and Kubrick decision to act in their films or use a body double demonstrates the self exploratory nature of the films. In fact all of the artists and writers in this study at one point had to face their own mortality, no doubt a driving force for their work.

If art is the mirror to hold up to our lives, there is much that we can learn from these films which tell us not only about the events of the century but also about our
deepest selves. Norman Brown offers the alternative to Freud, as Heraclitus did
thousands of years ago, of the ultimate unity of Eros and Thanatos. In the final chapter of
his book *Life Against Death* he offers “a way out” of the conflict. Brown’s solution is
twofold: we need more Eros in our lives and we need not see Thanatos as the “immortal
enemy” that Freud suggests. To live more erotically is certainly something we all can
do; however, as these films have demonstrated Eros is inextricably linked to death.
Brown’s second conclusion is one which is more plausible. Death is the ultimate
unknown for each one of us. If we could somehow come to terms with death not as a
negation of life than we would have the potential to lessen the anxiety we feel towards it.
It is ultimately up to us as individuals to determine for ourselves what the relationship is
between Eros and Thanatos. The work of these twentieth century filmmakers and those
that treated this theme in their work before them have helped to illuminate the
relationship between Eros and Thanatos and in doing so can help us to explore the
meaning of life, love, and death in our own lives.

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