

**CINEMATIC ACTS OF LOOKING AND COMPLICATED
DESIRES: REPRESENTING AGE-DIFFERENT
RELATIONSHIPS IN *DEATH IN VENICE* AND BEYOND**

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ABSTRACT

Luchino Visconti's 1971 film, *Death in Venice*, is noteworthy for being one of the earliest, and remarkably few, cinematic offerings of recent decades that explicitly explores the complicated desires of gay males who find themselves in age-different relationships without resorting to the trope of predatory pedophilia. What is perhaps most noteworthy about its contents, beyond its intriguing (and potentially controversial) subject matter, is the degree to which it foregrounds the significance of acts of looking in relation to the desires that surface within the story world, whether this process is carried out by characters within the film itself or by the spectator in relation to the on-screen actions as they unfold. Accordingly, this paper explores the importance of various acts of looking in relation to the representational contents of *Death in Venice*, which tells the story of the growing erotic desires between a middle-aged German composer and an underage Polish boy. It proceeds to examine how *Death in Venice* thereby set the stage for future representations of age-different relationships involving gay males in European films of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Keywords: cinema; homosexuality; intergenerational relationships; queerness; spectatorship