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June 12. 1961

Mr. Robert Littman
Hugh French Agency, Inc.
9405 Brighton Way
Beverly Hills, California

Dear Mr. Littman, -

thanks for your interesting letter of June 5th.

It so happens that we've received quite a number of offers and inquiries regarding DEATH IN VENICE during the past year or so. Both Hollywood and Europe have shown themselves interested. So far, however, we haven't arrived anywhere. In one case - just to show you what sort of difficulties we ran into - Tony Curtis was to play the part of Tadzio, - a role which, as you, of course, realise will have to be cast by a boy no older than 14.

Your suggestions sound very attractive indeed. Concerning Gustav von Aschenbach, either Sir Laurence Olivier or Sir John Gielgud could hardly be surpassed. James Mason, though doubtless a very first rate actor, would not, to our minds, fill the bill to quite the same perfection.

Needless to say, your financial offer is very poor. On the other hand, DEATH IN VENICE in a really first class production cannot but carry certain risks for its makers which is why the money angle shouldn't be permitted to barr an agreement. Since, however, you have already indicated your readiness to assign to us your net profits from exhibition of the film in Germany, I should like you to go two steps further and

- 1.) assign to us your net profits from exhibition of the film in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, while
- 2.) agreeing to let us have a certain percentage of all your net profits beyond certain boundaries which would as yet have to be determined.

On the whole, I feel that you are underestimating the financial possibilities of the project. If you just think of SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER which motion picture did contain quite some material that might have been objected to - and consider DEATH IN VENICE in comparison, you will find DEATH IN VENICE far less likely to be driven into the art theatres.

Moreover, DEATH IN VENICE, if produced on the highest artistic level and adhering as closely as possible to my father's long short story, would offer rather a unique possibility: the motion picture could combine all of the advantages of the late silent films with all those of the most advanced film technique. Practically there would have to be very little realistic "dialogue", - except for a lot of short international small talk, while the hero, Gustav von Aschenbach could - or even ought to - speak largely in a "mind-voice", - except, of course, when he is doing his real talking. I know the "mind-voice"-business not to be overly liked by either stars or directors; yet in this particular case there is not only hardly any choice but much additional attraction might arise from having Aschenbach thinking aloud. Also, the saleability of the proposed film abroad would no doubt be much enhanced by the proposed procedure. Take Germany alone: it would be rather difficult to get the German audience to accept a DEATH IN VENICE motion picture synchronised from the English in the ordinary way. Such a version couldn't possibly contain any of Thomas Mann's own language. Yet, it has been precisely that language which was largely responsible for the outstanding successes and box office hits of the three existing T.M.-films, ROYAL HIGHNESS, FELIX KRULL and BUDDENBROOKS. Though I personally took credit for writing the screen play of BUDDENBROOKS only, I really wrote most of the stuff of the others as well and therefore know that an astonishing lot of dialogues were taken literally from the books in question.

However all these are things that are not now at stake and I jotted them down just because I've given so much thought to a possible DEATH IN VENICE-film and felt that my suggestions - which are, of course just that and no more - might come in handy rather than possibly doing the slightest harm.

I am looking forward with great interest to your reply, and am

yours sincerely,

