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Casanova's Homecoming [Casanovas Heimkehr]

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Casanova's Homecoming [Casanovas Heimkehr]

Casanova's Homecoming was written in 1918 during the carnage of the first World War. Its publication was met with some controversy since Schnitzler's motives were questioned, given the appalling state of things in Europe then. Why, some asked, would Schnitzler be interested in writing a novel such as at a time of such universal privation? The answer lies not so much in the reputation of Casanova as a hedonistic scoundrel as it did in Casanova's human condition since the novel is a purely fictional account of Casanova, not in the figure of erotomaniac, but as a middle-aged poseur, a fiftyish nobleman who must recognize and relinquish his passing youth and accept the inevitability of ageing.

Though the novel is not without its erotic elements (in fact, Casanova sneaks into the young Marcolina's bedroom in the guise of her young lover Lieutenant Lorenzi, whom Casanova eventually kills) they are shown in contradistinction to the pathos and tragedy of ageing and its psychological effects, an approach to which Schnitzler was very much interested as seen in his collection of stories, *Vienna 1900*. But what truly stands out about the novel is its exceptionally modern tone. Given the nature of the novel as a product of the early nineteenth century, *Casanova's Homecoming* has many of the distinguishing features of mid to late 20th century Modernism and Postmodernism not only in its contemporary approach to understanding the psychology of certain characters, but in its postmodern fictional historicising of Casanova, his ribald antics and, ultimately, his acquiescence to the inevitability of old age. M R A

'Did he regret what he had lost through his perpetual seeking and never or ever finding, through this earthly and superearthly flitting from craving to pleasure and from pleasure back to craving once more? No, he had no regrets. He had lived such a life as none other before him; and could he not still live it after his own fashion? Everywhere there remained women upon his path, even though they might no longer be quite so crazy about him as of old'.

p74-75

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