



Casanova's Homecoming

Arthur Schnitzler

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Casanova's Homecoming is a story that will elicit many questions for the reader. Arthur Schnitzler was an Austrian playwright, author and doctor. Schnitzler's writings were criticized for their anti-Semitism and their explicit descriptions of sexuality. Schnitzler kept a diary for many years and for a period of time he recorded every organism and with whom in great detail. By the late eighteenth century Casanova, once one of the great lovers and adventurers of Europe, has become tired, old, and women no longer find him appealing. His exile from Venice is keeping his spirits at a low, and thus far his treatise against Voltaire remains unwritten. Arthur Schnitzler's Casanova's Homecoming is an examination of the great lover when he is no longer great, and when the only romances available to him seem to be with women equally old and worn. Old age does not sit well with Casanova. His arrogance, dutifully rewarded with the embrace of a thousand women when young, has remained unsatisfied for some time now. He idles his days recounting stories of his youth to men equally corpulent, and his gambling debts have become large. Schnitzler writes that Casanova, "though no longer driven by the lust of adventure that had spurred him in his youth, he was still hunted athwart the world, hunted now by a restlessness due to the approach of old age." As a literary device for exploring the eroticism of aged men, Casanova is a brilliant choice. Most people have heard of him, and if not, then the term is a common one when discussing the amorous adventures of young males. By writing of Casanova after he has peaked, instead of at his prime, Schnitzler is able to take one of the emblems of masculine sexuality and upturn it on its head. For the most part, this technique is exceptionally effective, for we instinctively expect Casanova to succeed because, well ? he's Casanova! It doesn't make sense that he wouldn't. His challenge comes early to the novel in the guise of Marcolina, a beautiful young woman who is the daughter of an old friend. Marcolina is a modern woman, interested in philosophy and literature, and not merely as nets by which to ensnare a potential husband. And, worse, she doesn't know who Casanova is ? his reputation has in no way preceded him.

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