

Arthur Schnitzler, Jordan Castro, and The Literature of Masculinity

Sean Hooks

EARLY THIS YEAR, I CAME ACROSS A conversation between the novelists Jonathan Lethem and Ben Markovits. Now in his sixties and a venerated member of a cohort of American writers who grappled with masculinity via pop culture, genre-bending, comic books, and cartoons, Lethem was grouped with Michael Chabon and David Foster Wallace as defining members of Gen X lit, educated and autodidactic philosoph-fictionists whose postmodern, metafictional works interrogate how cultural forces shape identity. Markovits, one of *Granta*'s best young British novelists in 2013 and a Booker Prize nominee in 2025, practiced historical fiction (about manhood) for much of his career, in works such as *The Syme Papers* (2004) and a trilogy inspired by the life of Lord Byron.¹ The two authors concurred that historical fiction is perceived as a backwater genre of middlebrow status. Markovits said, "Even though obviously the stuff that happens in the past is relevant today, it feels a little like an averting of your gaze."

I've been trying not to avert my gaze, to seriously parse ideas about masculinity

in fiction, to think about the inclusion (or marginalization) of the male writer in our present-day literary scene. This banter amongst the chattering classes often imports the word "crisis," whether it's Mary Gaitskill expressing empathy for incels or David Szalay, the reigning Booker winner (for *Flesh*, a "book about maleness") giving a talk at the Dallas Museum of Art which promotes his having "wielded his astute handling of contemporary masculinity." *Flesh* also recently won the yearly *The Morning News* "Tournament of Books," in a closely contested vote over Australian writer Vijay Khurana's *The Passenger Seat*, a novel about two alienated small-town teen males who descend into ideological masculinity rituals on a road trip that turns into a murder spree (inspired by a 2019 murder spree in northern British Columbia). The jacket copy describes it as "a searing examination of male friendship and masculinity in an age of toxic loneliness." Khurana's fellow Aussie, director Justin Kurzel, chronicles male gunge and rot in films like *Nitram* and *Snowtown*, while masculinity in letters now goes incessantly amateur-litigation mode on Substack and other social platforms, where one of the most prominent of current-day practitioners of what some call "men's lit" is Jordan Castro.

Proud mantle-taker of a strain of consternation that ranges from Alex Perez and his assertions that muscular writing about what it's like to be a male who isn't from a historically oppressed community (or one who is but doesn't let that define their story) gets short shrift in the publishing marketplace to literary movements like Dimes Square in NYC, publishing imprint Skyhorse Books, and websites skewing centrist or non-MAGA right, such as *Quillette*, *UnHerd*, *Tablet*, and *Compact*, Castro has released two novels in a genre one might call anti-autofiction. Both were published in hardback by indie presses, 2023's *The Novelist* from Soft Skull and 2025's *Muscle Man* from Catapult.

Scribes who magnetize attention are given plaudits for cultivating a "personality" in an increasingly technologized, dehumanized world where "creatives" are taught they must not only brand themselves but fight off the rising incursions of A.I. I've interacted in print with writers younger than myself—Brandon Taylor, Lauren Oyler, and Elvia Wilk—who have a knack for accruing clicks and actually get *reads* past just a headline or a first paragraph, whether through their published criticism or their socials posts. They might even be dubbed contrarian, a label Jordan Castro's two novels (he's also published two books of poetry from the experimental press Civil Coping Mechanisms, and was the editor of *New York Tyrant*, the lit mag put out by Tyrant Books) have attracted.

Castro's first, *The Novelist*, has been called, by Akosua Adasi writing in *Dirt*, a TikTok-era writer's attack on autofiction. Adasi compares Castro to Sally Rooney and Ottessa Moshfegh as hashtagable contrarians, and *Muscle Man* is described on *The Atlantic*'s Threads page as "a new novel about a socially awkward, contrarian professor," a book "that helps explain the manosphere." But I don't hear the same tocsin that others seem to (*The Brooklyn Rail* finds it hilarious and brilliant while *Bookforum* acclaims it as "an impassioned

jeremiad against contemporary mores"), and after much contemplation I find I'm not drawn to Castro's perceived audacity or uniqueness (*The Baffler* joins me as a dissenting voice, calling *Muscle Man*'s protagonist a cuck-coded Zarathustra and the book curiously weightless). I think about etymology when my college students use a certain word or phrase, and one I find myself regularly correcting is the difference between "methodical" and "meticulous." Castro's books have moments of methodical observational brilliance but are far more often merely meticulous (one might even say overly manscaped).

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"Methodical" is laudable. It takes the madness and arranges it, orders it, makes it digestible to others—along with Lethem, Markovits, Chabon, and Wallace, Richard Powers and David Mitchell are writers who incarnate this aspect of tough but cerebral masculine writing; and yes, women's literary writing can also be methodical, stoic, and brainy, as the works of Joyce Carol Oates, A.M. Homes, Dana Spiotta, Jennifer Egan, A.L. Kennedy, and Rachel Kushner leap to mind—but "meticulous" responds to the madness through fear. The Latin roots of "meticulous" are "dread" and "anxiety." When you're meticulous, you're arranging the items on your plate oh-so-fastidiously, because you're afraid that the goo from the carrots, corn, or beans might seep into the mashed potatoes or stain the sliced meat. You're desperate for control.

¹ Markovits' "Byron trilogy" is *Imposture* (2007), *A Quiet Adjustment* (2008), and *Childish Loves* (2011).

The second of Castro's books, the campus novel/gym novel mashup *Muscle Men*, disappointed me. It seems destined to become dated, a book that wants to be "of its moment" but will come to seem contrived, mired in a period of reactionary affect—cancel culture, virtue signaling, woke politics, post-pandemic male loneliness epidemic, land acknowledgment statements, body-hacking, handwringing over Rogan, men inhabiting spaces and places that used to be "theirs" now policed and overseen by a women-and-minorities-first surveillance culture waiting to gotcha them around every corner for their too hirsute and too handsy braggadocio, their "manspreading" or "mansplaining," or their baseline attractedness to female forms and their ambitions toward perfecting (or "looksmaxxing") their own.

In the lobby, Harold walked past racks of snacks and powders—protein, amino acids, some type of crackers, all branded with psychotic fonts with pointy edges and dripping letters—and out into the gym. He texted David, "Hah." The front of the gym was wide open, an uncluttered expanse of black flooring for calisthenics...Harold was pleased to see no men in that section. He often saw large men doing crunches and sit-ups like maniacs, drenched in sweat, grunting, hoping to get a chiseled midsection, when this was for the most part hopeless: the visibility of abs was almost exclusively dependent on one's body fat percentage.

Castro's previous novel, cheekily titled *The Novelist*, is more provocative, but I still can't spare it from the judgment that it's more meticulous than methodical. A defecation-obsessed passage of twenty pages, mentioned in almost every review, impressed me in the moment for commitment to the bit, and it's a memorable one, but in the way a very long joke with a very simplistic punchline is memorable. It's not indelible. It feels like a novel that aimed for the Kaufmans (Andy and Charlie) but landed in the Pauls (Logan and Jake).

What tripped my mind to a solution, or at least a fairer way to analyze the masculinity-in-lit critical-take spectrum, was endeavoring to concoct a thesis regarding the value of the two-novel (so far) Castro canon while researching Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film *Eyes Wide Shut* (gender-in-art mainstay, maybe even rubicon) and its source text, Arthur Schnitzler's 1926 novella *Dream Story*. In my librarial explorations, I came across Schnitzler's early masterwork (and potential skeleton key/Rosetta Stone) *Lieutenant Gustl*. This is a slim volume, more a novelette or long story than Castro's books are, originally published as a feuilleton in 1900. It enthralled me.

Arthur Schnitzler was a rogue-bearded Austrian (Pitt/Chalamet-coiffed in his youth) who bridged the end of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth, an author and playwright who inspired Max Ophüls and Tom Stoppard and Kubrick's eternally-gestated final film, who dissected bourgeois aspirations via old-school modernism. Not "big" modernism à la James Joyce or Thomas Mann, no, Schnitzler's the guy who compacted his modernism, who in his plays draws from Anton Chekhov, his fellow doctor/writer, and in his fiction, particularly the posthumously published *Late Fame*, fixates on the very issues with which Castro wrestles.

Check out that most banal point of entry, the Amazon.com description of *Late Fame*, and tell me this isn't a synthesis of Castro's diatribal output: "Eduard Saxberger is a quiet man who is getting on in years and has spent the better part of them working at a desk in an office. Once upon a time, however, he published a book of poetry." Might as well call it *The Poet* to pair with *The Novelist*, as *Late Fame*'s protagonist wants to be a somebody and obsesses over it. He's neither a family man nor a gooner, but an elderly civil servant, an ex-guy, a former dude, someone who his whole life was a thinker and overthinker, a man very much in his own head, a lamenter like *The Novelist*'s narrator.

That Castro narrator even muses in a highbrow Southern Europe-y way. "My old French press, a glass Bodum with a red plastic exterior, never had this problem: it never let any tea leaves, let alone many tea leaves, escape into the tea. My old French press, the Bodum, was perfect." He waxes poetic about pooping and iPhones, yerba mate and heroin, this ennui maven who's of course a nameless protagonist, an ever-distractible procrastinator, if one who drops the occasional chuckle-eliciting riposte: "Eric, following his liberal arts school ex-girlfriend, was so full of impotent hatred for the people in his life that he had no choice but to love 'the less fortunate'; then he could use 'the less fortunate' as a new bat to beat people over the head with, as opposed to his old bat of pure nihilism."

In *Muscle Man*, we're third-person, so the non-tenured professor Harold's internality as he impulsively absconds with an art student's backpack renders as:

What did it really amount to? he thought. Anyone with half a brain would do just as I have done. But no one at Shepherd had even half a brain. That was the problem. The college was teeming with a kind of less-than-half-brainedness, an anti-curiosity; no one went out in search of anything with stakes; no one had skin in the game.

Harold lives inside his own head, keeps it one hundred on his victim mentality, and justifies his theft in pseudo-Raskolnikovian terms because the special snowflakes like himself, those "who aspired to something better than the drudgery of mediocrity" must have their allowable exceptionalism, and "every genius or near-genius had his excesses." Howard groups himself in that self-appointed lot, a man whose enemies are wastrels washed upon the shores of academia, rule followers and code endorsers constantly implying that he's a privileged white guy who should STFU. Harold seethes.

Schnitzler's Saxberger roils. He's not worried about Twitter and Insta, Tinder and Hinge,

he's a tinderbox unhinged, a military man, not a muscle man, jittery and oppressed while obviously ensconced in (actual and thoroughgoing) Eurocentric privilege. He opens the novel grousing about his opera seats.

The book's first paragraph fits it as, "I wish I were sitting on the aisle! Steady, steady! Even oratorios end some time. Perhaps this one's very beautiful, and I'm just in the wrong mood. Well, why not? When I think that I came here for diversion...I should have given my ticket to Benedek. He likes this sort of thing. Plays violin. But in that case Kopetsky would have felt insulted." But even more than Saxberger's vanity and pretension, Lieutenant Gustl becomes my locus of contention with those complainers about the underappreciated "modern literary man" because Gustl is rant-as-person, or even character-as-rant.

In the hierarchy of Viennese capital-S Society, he's a middler. Or a tweener, to appropriate some sports lingo. Not quite a big-and-burly nor a slim-and-quick, and that lieutenant slot indicates a man hovering above the sergeant tier but tagged with a rank known for not quite getting one's stripes or chair or log or the big "C" on his uniform or the senior-officer status and full-on desk-with-corner-office, not a captain, of industry or of receiving his online apportionment of "aye aye"s, which unfortunately seems like the real goal of so many of the fellas griping about AWP's and MFAs and colophons and the obnoxiousness of the listmakers of "bad men" who call out as red flags males who dare to love masterpieces of prose by Nabokov and Salinger, verse by Bukowski and Larkin. Such online scolds are pretty darn obvious, agenda'd, and trite, though, I'll give the fellas that.

Lieutenant Gustl is a rip-roar, constructed in full as an interior monologue. There's a perfectly paced continuity reminiscent of our best minute-by-minute breakdowns of movies or TV episodes. Its first-person protagonist sees himself as an overcomer of slights, constantly self-affirming and self-excoriating both.

He dismisses a rival named Doschintzky as a socialist, impudent and insolent: “All the enemies of law and order are Socialists these days. They’re a gang.... They’d like to do away with the whole army, but they never think of who could help them out if the Chinese ever invaded the country. Fools!” MAGA/Trump, anyone? Gustl (whose name is a diminutive, and its sound conjures the image of goose-stepping—both past and future, an iconic behavior of military menfolk from the region) remains, throughout the text, fixated on social standing, status, and whether he’s being usurped and disrespected. As W.G. Sebald wrote of Schnitzler, “The enduring fascination of his work lies in the way it describes—with regret, but without pathos—the calamities occasioned by an ideal that becomes an *idée fixe*, and thereby does far more justice to actual social and psychological states.” In the lingua franca of his day, Gustl’s granular fixation isn’t *The Novelist’s* ethics or *Muscle Man’s* spirituality, but honor.

Published as *Leutnant Gustl* and credited as the first work of German literature to deploy a stream-of-consciousness narrative, this micro-novel from late 1900 wasn’t translated into English until 1926, the year of Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Originally translated as *None but the Brave*, *Lieutenant Gustl* opens not at the café or the bullfight, but at that concert, the oratorio (Gustl thought it was supposed to be a mass and then wishes it were *La traviata*, playing later in the week), with a Fraulein Walker doing the alto and a Fraulein Michalek the soprano, and not in sunny post-World War I Pamplona but in dark-und-chilly Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century.

The late 1920s have inherent to them modernity and modernism both, but that deceptively brief two-decade span places *Lieutenant Gustl* in a much different register; an olde-world quality pervades, and the protagonist’s fascination with duels and manhood, with cantatas and soloists, with

trussed-up raiment and social behavior (“The fellow next to me is clapping as if he were crazy. Wonder if he really likes it as much as all that?”), with rigidly defined racial/ethnic classes (predominantly Jewishness, as anti-Semitism endured and overcome was a constant in Schnitzler’s life and fiction), makes it even more reflexive than Hemingway’s most readable full novel and even more un-self-censoring than Castro’s anxiety-riddled exposés. Schnitzler presents us, by story’s end, with a fully suicidal narrator so butthurt—to use one of our more sophomoric but honest modern terms—by his interaction with a local baker, that he unspools, undergoing a near psychic break from reality. His obsession with reputation and perception, and his fumbling to curtail an on-full-display insecurity, read today as the apex of the mountain Castro half climbs.

And Jordan may still get there. I see *Muscle Man* as a failed second novel, trying to bait controversy via its calculated-unlikelihood main character, a “beta” with a machismo fetish, but its neither vulgar nor scabrous enough to be truly transgressive, and repeating the whole-plot-occurs-in-one-day trope from the prior book feels gimmicky. *The Novelist* showed enough promise that I’m taking him seriously and looking forward to future works, but I for one think Castro would benefit from going *more* novelly, abandoning the Harmony Korine pose of subversiveness, the post-Palahniuk wiseacre act. Target instead something more substantive, the experimental-but-accessible vein seen not that long ago in works from across the pond like Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* or Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*; shoot for the encompassing braininess of Powers’s *The Goldbug Variations* or the for-real masculinity crisis of Frederick Exley’s *A Fan’s Notes*; dwell within the minor-key masterpieces of American indie stalwarts like John Brandon or John Haskell for inspiration; angle for less of the winnowed cleverness (see Castro’s half-executed essay about Ayn Rand in *The Paris Review*), less aping of alt-lit

and Bret Easton Ellis and trying to be the cool kid, the anti-heroic slacker. Trade spirit animal Nicholson Baker’s debut (*The Mezzanine*) for Tom McCarthy’s (*Remainder*). Keep the “I ain’t no Ben Lerner,” preserve the “I don’t do wan husk autofiction,” but don’t become a *New Yorker* stan either. And stop thinking that writing about the internet will save you or make you unique.

I won’t deem *Lieutenant Gustl* an “internet-anticipating text” or “blindingly prescient,” but I couldn’t stop thinking about Schnitzler’s dead-on account of the modernist (and infinite) male’s need to see himself as the center of his own life story as his link to Castro. The humanist impulse gets most mawkish when it attempts to contravene western individualism. The weakest parts of both David Wallace’s and George Saunders’s oeuvres, as seminal (hee-hee) as they are to any discussion of this masculinity-in-literature trope and its most self-aware manifestations, are when they tilt at the sentimental. Saunders, critical darling and beloved “nice guy” for decades, has gotten the most lacerating reviews of his garlanded career for his 2026 publication *Vigil*, a mini-novel oft-described as too forgiving, too deterministic in the philosophy-101 sense, too full of pabulum, bromides about comforting each other because there is no such thing as free will anyhoo. And Wallace’s 2005 Kenyon College graduation speech, “This is Water,” has myriad material insights, but occasionally succumbs to that leaden weight sentiment, that, “Hey now, hey now, youngster” tone of beseeching, “Y’all graduating Midwest kiddoes, don’t stick to that default setting of ‘I’m the center of everything,’ ya’ hear now? Because perchance it is actually *you* who ‘are the asshole,’” if you may allow me to allude to one of Reddit’s most famous forums.

Especially in his first novel, Castro does make me laugh, and that’s no small accomplishment. The deadening humorlessness of virtue literature and

its practitioners is a greater problem for book lovers and the publishing industry in 2026 than whether or not a refusal to publish straight white males is a systematic discrimination, a systemic correction, or a synthetic form of comeuppance + reckoning + accountability + arbitrage + purgation + revenge, but Castro’s books don’t really fight the good fight because they don’t ignite a frisson.

Schnitzler’s Gustl makes me laugh but he also scares me. His arrogance and his desire to murder a civilian he considers inferior (one who has the temerity to stand up to him) recalls eerily the recent killings of both Charlie Kirk and Renee Good. And Gustl’s narcissistic misery unfolds so damn *vividly* on the page. The microscopically described protagonists of Castro’s novels live the way they do while the prose zooms in to 8K clarity as part of a larger *point*. They’re not artless, but too often they’re mouthpieces for an intellectual exercise.

Novelist, memoirist, and mentor Harry Crews, masculinism apogee and no stranger to the gym or the literature of men, comfortable writing about combat while adept as a beloved creative writing prof at the University of Florida, taught in his workshops that fiction writing with a point equaled propaganda. Crews was uninterested in writers trying to use literature to prove things. He valued embodied experience, not appropriating the arts to didactically argue in favor of ideas. And Crews’s writing, if you’ve ever encountered it, has no lack of willingness to traffic in the grotesque, the discomfiting. He was a specificity-obsessed regionalist who with every book spelunked down into the most unflattering aspects of human behavior.

Unpalatable versus unflattering, then, is another distinction that kept flashing as I waded into Castro and Schnitzler. Castro’s men are cringe, unpalatable in their narcissism, whereas Schnitzler’s are composed unflatteringly and unerringly. Think of *Dream Story/Eyes Wide Shut* here for the comparison,

the humiliations endured by the doctor protagonist, Fridolin in the book and Bill Harford as portrayed by Tom Cruise in the flick. Schnitzler's texts have an abundance of intellect, but they don't have a point or a thesis or that vibe of "meta"-ness that Castro lacquers on rather thickly—decades after Philip Roth's various doppelgangers, shapeshifters, and impostors, *The Novelist's* deployment of "Jordan Castro" as a famous novelist in a novel by Jordan Castro feels tired, even hackneyed.

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Lieutenant Gustl manages to be both more honest and to better immerse and evoke. You think and feel along with the lieutenant, his Costanza-like desire to get back at someone who slighted him: "I just stood there and took it as if someone had knocked me silly.... But I couldn't say word—couldn't do a thing. All I did was stand there—, quiet, absolutely quiet!... It's awful; it's unbearable; I must kill him on the spot, wherever I happen to meet him!... I let a swine like that get away with it!... He can tell everybody just exactly what he said to me!" Castro gets there periodically, he's not a total flop, but there's something self-conscious in it.

That stultified self-consciousness is annoyingly present in the prose of most "highly online" writers, even the best of them (Sally Rooney), and with someone like Patricia Lockwood, almost everything after her viral and career-making "Rape Joke" has been downright waylaid by that snippet-like approach, for my *centavos* anyway. In Schnitzler's terse and propulsive sentences

there's an accrual of involvement, an awareness of immiseration. The reader stops seeing the distinction between actor and role; you're in it. As another masculinity scrutinizer, Robert Stone, put it: "There's only one subject for fiction or poetry or even a joke: how it is. In all the arts, the payoff is always the same: recognition. If it works, you say that's real, that's truth, that's life, that's the way things are. There it is." Perhaps even better (or at least more German) than fiction which awakens in the reader a frisson, with *Lieutenant Gustl* Schnitzler devised a book that makes the reader inhabit a gestalt.

Castro has some legitimately great parts, but he hasn't gotten there yet re: the sum. The commentary on navel gazing as mental illness floats too close to a literary style that is itself insular and undynamic, self-consciously trying to skewer self-consciousness. "Feeling self-conscious and adrenaline filled, like a novice bank robber backing away from the teller, I began changing my novel from present to past tense," is a line characteristic of Castro's titular novelist, who then waffles about his choice and quickly determines he's made his manuscript worse. It's too inside-baseball, too much someone live-narrating their NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) submission, with thrown-in references to being told to "Fuck off" via Gmail or a nod at LSD and other casual drug use as allusion to generational copium and addiction that reaches (for Thomas De Quincey, methinks, if Castro's interviews about his own struggles with sobriety and faith/Catholicism hold water) but doesn't grasp.

Schnitzler's short book bounds and glides. It has in its lines and scenes a sprezzatura, an earned confidence, not just a charismatic line or two (those lulz in Castro that are too often quickly forgotten). The whole of *Lieutenant Gustl* flows. It ribbons out, it swerves, it behaves like people you know even though it was conceived and executed 125 years ago.

Well, what's this?—Hey, there, Johann, bring me a glass of fresh water.... What's this?... Where?... Am I dreaming? My head. Oh, Good Lord.... I can't see straight!—I'm all dressed!—Where am I sitting?—Holy God, I've been sleeping! How could I have been sleeping? It's already growing light. How long have I been sleeping? I mustn't ask—must look at my watch—can't see a thing.... Where are my matches? Won't a single one of them light?... Three o'clock, and I'm to have my duel at four.—No, not a duel—a suicide! It has nothing to do with a duel; I must shoot myself because a baker called me a fathead.

You can hear the urgency, the immediacy, the self-loathing, the disgust, the absurdity. It's imaginative, and it's methodical and un-mimetic in its deconstruction of the mundane. Masculinity is its qualia, not its subject matter, not its locus of discourse, not something that its author is trying to take apart like a bored kid who unscrews the housing of an old-school alarm clock, to add a straightforward simile amidst these art-world, pomo words. *Lieutenant Gustl's* dense and plosive paragraphs anticipate Thomas Bernhard's, whereas Castro's timidly recreate them or overtly allude to them—both its flap copy and *The Novelist* itself are preoccupied with Bernhard's monologic satire *Woodcutters*.

Is Castro "right" to skewer the resentful, wannabe-jacked academics? The screen addicted, ass-wiping obsessed, coffee-hardware fanatics? Sure. For prime cut social critique, cadge this graf from *The Novelist*:

Because of the way people process and interact with their political opinions now, their political opinions have become ruinously linked with their personalities to an unprecedented degree. Whereas before, it was uncouth to ask others who they voted for, or what they believed, now

people process and interact with their political opinions immediately, in public, all the time, on a platform designed to addict them, so instead of thinking in any meaningful sense about what they think, feel, and believe, people are more or less always self-consciously performing, and becoming addicted to that performance... Now, people conflate their opinions with their personalities, and not only that, they conflate their opinions with that part of their personalities that specifically seeks to be liked.

Yes, hunting-and-gathering "likes" is a plague, as is fearmongering online and in the workplace, as is the corporatization of the arts, as is people who reduce their worldview to a lockstep liberal lawn sign or a neocon red ballcap; I just want to see it enacted via character and plot. Or perhaps the "essay film" is an outlet for Castro the farceur, and he'll cobble together some outré quasi-mockumentary inspired by Orson Welles's *F for Fake* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* that soapboxes its irony-drizzled politics with sheer nerve and verve.

For now, though, I find more artful stimuli in the whip-smart minis fired from a fin de siècle Southern Europe navigated by a long-deceased provocateur, one who achieved posthumous (*really* late) fame and who chronicled the brutal banalities and random vulnerabilities borne by the everyman, the sorrowful or enraged male, his days wrought by (and fraught with) insecurity in the minute-to-minute worlds from which Schnitzler wrings so much. Castro's talent is distillation, but his books suffer from being the equivalent of the online commentariat put between endpapers. They aren't worlds, they're worldbuilding. **A**

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