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Schnitzler’s *Anatol* as a Philosophical Comedy

Mark W. Roche

Schnitzler’s *Anatol* is a splendid and entertaining situation comedy: one thinks of Anatol’s hypnotism of Cora and his unwillingness to ask the crucial question; the dramatic irony of his episode with Bianca; the comic one-upmanship in “Abschiedssuppe”; or Anatol’s trying to get his latest girlfriend out of bed so that he can get dressed for his wedding with another woman. But Anatol is more than just a clever portrayal of comic situations; it is a philosophical comedy that reflects on abstract issues such as truth and illusion, unity and multiplicity, and stability and impermanence; the play integrates essential dimensions of high comedy: the critique of asymmetrical relations; the hero’s obsession with his own subjectivity; the parody of tragedy; the protagonist’s identity crisis; the comic dimensions of philosophical contradiction; and the hero’s intuitive desire for intersubjectivity.1

Asymmetrical relationships appear frequently in comic texts. The subordinate part of such a relationship tends to be taken by a woman or servant (though in Lessing’s *Die Juden* it is the Jew). This accounts in part for the frequency of the Don Juan motif and its variations and of servants in comic texts. (They are there not only for their wit.) What is fascinating about Anatol’s asymmetrical behavior is that it is countered by an intuitive desire for symmetry. A symmetrical relationship is necessarily a one-to-one correspondence, and Anatol insists with an almost tyrannical bent on being the exclusive object of his beloved’s affections. The crucial question he wants to ask Cora relates to her faithfulness.2 The crisis of “Denksteine” revolves around Anatol’s demand that the two partners love only one another. In “Abschiedssuppe” Annie and Anatol jab each other by claiming that their relationship was never as symmetrical as the other thought. The asymmetry of loving a married woman bothers Anatol in “Agonie”: he asks Elisa to imagine that the two of them are alone in the world (67).3 Finally, Anatol’s marriage, which is
in part a gesture to (and subversion of) comic tradition, also reveals the hero’s intuitive desires for openness. The incongruity of Anatol’s longing for unity while succumbing to a multiplicity of moods and relationships constitutes the material for much of the text’s comedy.

Symmetry presupposes not only a one-to-one correspondence but also an equality between individuals. The subject treats the other as a free subject, not an object. Here too Anatol’s usurping of the symmetrical ideal furnishes us with comic passages. Hypnosis is in part a metaphor for possession. Anatol states: “Ich habe sie in meiner Mach“ (10). Max fears that if he were under hypnosis Anatol might tell him he’s a chimney sweep, and before long he’d be covered with soot (7). In “Epinode“ Anatol names not objects, metaphors, and moods. The one name mentioned is selected for the purpose of a rhyme: “Wilde... Matilde“ (31). Anatol mentions that he dropped one girl much the way one absent-mindedly abandon an umbrella (33). Instrumentalization, however, is not restricted to the male side. Gabrielle struggles to assert power over Anatol’s abode as soon as Anatol triggers her sexual vanity by sketching an idyll with another woman. In “Abschiedsentferner“ the instrumentalization of the other is expressed in economic terms. Annie stuffs herself with champagne and oysters as she bids Anatol farewell. Elsa uses Anatol as well for diversion from her boring marriage. Max nicely illustrates the contemporary subordination of love to possession when he asserts in “Epinode“ that, although Anatol’s former girlfriends may all have stopped loving him, they might still experience jealousy (30). Anatol’s multiple relations and those of his partners turn out to be everything but liberating; they are revealed as extreme forms of consumerism and instrumentalization. The fact that this instrumentalization functions on both sides suggests, paradoxically, not an overcoming, but a doubling, of asymmetry.

Anatol’s instrumentalization of others derives in part from his extreme subjectivity, a dominant feature in modern European comedy. Subjectivity is above all an unwillingness to enter into relations with others or an inability to treat others as equals. An effect of subjectivity of which we see bits and pieces in Anatol is the hero’s focus on consciousness and self-reflection at the expense of genuine communication, and within the act of self-reflection a focus not on universals but on the particularity of the self. More significant for Anatol is the arrogance that accompanies subjectivity. Anatol is blinded by a sense of his own greatness. He sees himself as the lover every woman wants to be with and the man no woman can forget. Every woman he embraces is transformed into a virgin (99). Functions in part to undermine Anatol’s subjectivity. He is a Mephistophelean companion who deflates Anatol’s claims to greatness, above all by mirroring Anatol’s words and concepts.

He is the realist, the pragmatist, the cynic. Max is more insightful than Anatol, and many of his best lines pass right by the hero’s story (5).

Though Anatol wants to bury his past, discard the specter of continuity, and live only for the moment, he also needs the memory of his previous exploits to convince himself of his own greatness. He alone can experience unique and intense moods: “Das Geheimnis der ganzen Sache ist, daß ich’s erlebt habe“ (34). However, when Anatol asserts the uniqueness of his experiences and his superior knowledge of Bianca, Max argues: “Nicht ich habe etwas übersehen, was an ihr war; sondern du hast, was nicht an ihr war. Aus dem reichen und schönen Leben deiner Seele hast du deine phantastische Jugend und Blut in ihr nichtiges Herz hineinopfern, und was dir entgegen, gängelte, war Licht von deinem Licht“ (37). We see in this passage a clever inversion of the traditional rhetoric of truth as enlightenment: Anatol’s light is the light of subjectivity, the light of illusion, not truth; in reality Anatol prefers dust, the dimming of lights, “das Halbdunkel“ (36). We also recognize in this passage a pattern Anatol shares with Hofmannsthal’s Der Schwierige: problems with communication arise less from semantic difficulties than from the application of false categories of subjectivity, i.e., the characters’ unwillingness or inability to consider the positions of others. Anatol sees not the other but an image of the other derived from his own self: “Du bestest das an, was du in sie hineinträgst“ (98). Anatol’s partners are means to his evocation of moods; they are not ends. They become therefore interchangeable.

Identity crises are comic staples in texts as diverse as Shakespeare’s As You Like It, Kleist’s Amphitryon, and Woody Allen’s Zelig. In not recognizing the other as other Anatol fails to develop a stable relationship and a true self-identity. He becomes as interchangeable as his counterparts. Bianca, for example, confuses Anatol with someone in St. Petersburg. Anatol’s sense of time furthers this dissolution of selfhood: because he is immersed only in the moment, Anatol loses all continuity. For the man who lives only in the moment the moment is always already past: “Während ich den warmen Hauch lühes Mundes auf meiner Hand fühle, erhebe ich das Ganze schon in der Erinnerung. Es war eigentlich schon vorüber“ (35). The hero’s loss of identity, his multiple selfhood, is especially brought to the fore on the morning of his wedding when he claims to be the best man at the wedding in which he is also the groom.

Anatol’s identity crisis, his conflict of selves, is for the audience comic, but Anatol, supported by an inflated view of his own subjectivity, must read the conflict as tragic. Parody of tragedy is another frequent comic motif, beginning already with Aristophanes. The parody can take either of two forms: it can be directed against the tragic dimension, as in Lena’s Der Hofmeister,
where pathos and self-sacrifice are mocked, or as in Anatol it can leave tragically intact but parody the hero who claims—in his obsessive subjectivity—that his fate is tragic. The audience of course recognizes that the hero cannot be taken seriously. Weak heroes, pitying themselves and obsessed with their own particular suffering, can hardly be viewed as tragic. The tragic hero is committed to a goal; Anatol, in part because of his sense of time, has no goals. One of his favorite words is “Spazieren”: “Es liegt so herzlich, Planlosen in dem Worten!” (20). The tragic hero adheres to principles; he is consistent. Anatol is the epitome of inconsistency. In its final scene the play mocks this inconsistency together with Anatol’s assumption of tragic grandeur. Despite leaving one woman after another Anatol still takes his tea with rum and two sugars. Ilona asserts: “Rum und zwei Stück Zucker, (zu Max) der hat Prinzipien!” (79). Anatol reaches intersubjectivity only at the level of adolescence; he gains tragic status meanwhile only at the level of nourishment. Anatol’s suffering does not derive from a tragic collision, from adherence to an absolute value, or from an assertion of formal greatness; instead Anatol has fallen in love—for one scene at least—with a married woman. Like the Stöc hero, however, Anatol accepts his fate: “muss muß sich fügen” (67). Annie too would assume tragic stature. She appears to tragic inevitability when she falls out of love with Anatol: “Es ist meine Bestimmung—und gegen meine Bestimmung kann ich nichts tun und gegen mein Bestimmung kann ich ... nichts tun, tun ... (59).

Anatol contains one tragic peripeteia after another; however, in Ana
tol’s case these do not lead to any kind of agonamorthis, since he fails to recog
nize the various reversals. 7 It is symbolic of his lack of self-understanding that Anatol can hypnotize others but not himself. He sees himself as beyond the moment of union with Bianca, but it is she who has forgotten, and he who has remembered. 8 When at the end of “Denksteine” Anatol calls Emilie a whore, he fails to see the consequences for his own relationship to her. Doesn’t Anatol’s accusation recall back on himself and imply that he treats her as an object, a possession? 9 “Abschiedsouper” contains another rever
sal. Anatol’s desire to free himself of Annie is thwarted when he finds that she is already free of him. At the end of “Agnie” Anatol’s kiss would make Elia just one more; in truth it makes Anatol just one more. In this episode Anatol is the other man.

Much of the comedy of Anatol derives from an incongruity between the hero’s pose as a tragic hero and the ludicrous level at which he asserts this pose. The laughter of incongruity shares much with a philosophy that focuses on contradictions. Anatol contradicts himself frequently, giving rise to laughter, as the contradictions demonstrate the untenability of his position.

Reminiscing about his earlier relationships, Anatol imagines a magic formula that would bring back all his lovers: “Ich rufe also: Einzig Geheite ... Und nun kommt sie!” (30). When Anatol swears eternal love, he reflects on the conditions of a possible break-up: “Ich habe es Annie auffichtig gesagt, gleich —gleich, ganz zu Anfang ... wie wir uns ewige Liebe schwören: Weibt du, liebe Annie—wer von uns eines schönen Tages spricht, daß es zu Ende geht—sagt es dem andern rund herum ...” (51). Though Anatol himself collects remembrances, he forbids Emilie in “Denksteine” from keeping anything from her past, even a memory that, at Anatol once put it, served her development toward a relationship with Anatol (45). As Anatol tries to send Ilona out of his apartment so that he can go to his wedding, he still has the audacity to promise her “jetzt gibt es keine Abreise mehr ... keine Trennung” (77). In “Anatol’s Großenwahn” he asks Max: “Hast du übrigens etwas dagew
gen wenn ich das Gegenteil von dem habe? was ich vor einer Minute sagte?” Max responds: “Oh, ich erwartete es!” (92). Anatol’s criterion for the acceptance of a position is not the law of noncontradiction but the degree of pleasure and pain: “Nun, beweisen läßt sich das nicht—aber ich nehme es an; weil mir das Gegenteil unangenehm wäre” (69). The text underlines these philosophical contradictions by introducing rhetorical ones, for example Ana
tol’s assertion: “mein Leichten ist so schwerminig geworden” (108). 10 We see here not a classical and harmonious oxymoron but an unresolved contra
diction.

The text contains additional contradictions, but the most significant one is general. Anatol’s whole life is a contradiction, and each relationship is based on an illusion. He asserts his desire to know the truth about Coria’s fidelity, but he fails to ask the question, which would be to risk losing posses
sion over Coria. The relationship continues only on the basis of illusion. How
ever, the illusion that makes the relationship possible is the same one that will inevitably lead to its dissolution. 14 The relationship cannot last; it remains asymmetrical and superficial. Not by chance does the second scene open with Anatol talking to a former girlfriend about his current beloved. Anatol’s stress on the moment supports this sequential structure. Acknowledging the ephemeralty of relations Anatol asks: “Weiss man denn überhaupt im Herbst, wenn man zu Weihnachten etwas schenken wird?” (21).

Throughout the text Anatol asserts his desire for truth. From Cora he would hear “ein wahres Wort” (10). In “Denksteine” Anatol asserts: “die Wahrheit will ich wissen!” (44). To Annie the phrase is: “Lüge nicht!” (57). In “Anatol’s Großenwahn” Anatol reaffirms his stance to Berta: “Ich habe dich immer beschworen, nur die Wahrheit zu sagen!” (106). What Anatol really wants, however, is not truth but a livable illusion that appears as truth,
an illusion not recognized as illusion. Anato! despite his own illusions, still
upholds, theoretically at least, the priority of reality over appearance (108).
Anato! fails to ask the crucial question less out of his concern with language
than out of his subconscious fear of truth.26 Emile states of Anato! and his
likemates: "Ich vertrage sie nicht, die Wahrheit" (46). The situation is com-
plex: Anato! wants truth but cannot bear it. Thus he must live by illusion,
but illusion doesn't satisfy him. So he moves on to new relationships, always
looking for the ideal, which he cannot reach, and the truth, which he cannot
accept. The text has a distinctly Faustian dimension to it.17 In this rewriting
of the Faust story, however, one sees yet another parody of tragedy. Faust
wants truth but can't reach it; his weakness becomes his strength insofar as it
drives him ever forward. Anato! is simply mediocre: he says he wants truth,
but he does not search for it. Fearing its consequences, he actively avoids it.
Faust and Anato! are spurred to new adventures in totally different ways.
Besides the finite contradictions and the contradiction between truth
and illusion is the contradiction between the one and the many. Anato!
states: "Es gibt so viele Krankheiten und nur eine Gesundheit" (65). His
assertion echoes an important passage in Plato's Republic and shows the
proximity of the truth-versus-illusion dichotomy to that of the one-versus-
the-many. Socrates states: "There is one form of excellence, while the forms
of evil are infinite" (444c).18 One could organize one's reading of Anato!
by proposing two columns with unity and multiplicity at the top:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One</th>
<th>Many</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>truth</td>
<td>illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>sickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constancy</td>
<td>moods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stability</td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marriage</td>
<td>affairs, adultery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eternity</td>
<td>moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boredom</td>
<td>new impressions, amusements, and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>philosophy</td>
<td>taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomy</td>
<td>heteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classless society</td>
<td>class divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self</td>
<td>split self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organic drama</td>
<td>multiple episodes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though there may be only one true answer to a given question, the number

of false responses is infinite. Anato! is not geared toward singular truth; he
is a man of the senses, an aesthetic man, a man with taste; he is therefore a
matter of deception and illusion, even concerning his own self. It is this life
of illusion that deprives Anato! of health. With the valorization of the aesthetic
comes, however, an appreciation of moments of decay, sickness, and decea-
dence. Because Anato! affirms subjectivity, he is willing to embrace that ill-
ness which makes him unique (or from an external perspective seems to make
him unique—the reader knows how predictable and common Anato! has be-
come). Anato! revels in his life of impressions. His assertion of multiplicity
keeps him moving from one relationship to the next. As his many moods
change, so do his partners. The Faustian longing for the eternal moment is
met with an equally strong longing for ever new moments and moods. Al-
though love has been defined from Plato to Hegel and beyond as the unity of
unity and multiplicity, Anato!'s love becomes the nonsynthesis of the one
and the many. It is an ultimate incongruity to see the man of many moods
confront the institution of oneness and stability. The text points this out; on
the morning of his wedding Anato! is "nicht in der Stimmung zum Heiraten"
(72). The decision of one's life is reduced to a momentary lapse in mood.
Marriage becomes, if you will, an episode.26 Were it permanent, it would lead
to boredom. Brief adventures, on the other hand, allow Anato! to renew his
impressions and cover any internal vacuum.21 For Anato! moods supersede
questions of morality. In a further inversion of the tragic mode Anato!
responds to Max's comment that his behavior on his wedding day is "unnora-
mlisch" with the clear affirmation of mood over principle: for Anato! it is
above all "traurig" (77). Anato!'s lack of morality has more than private
consequences: the embrace of multiplicity over unity obviously leads to class
divisions (society is not one but two, rich and poor), and Anato! lives his life
of leisure on the basis of this multiplicity. Finally, Anato!'s embrace of multi-
licity leads to his split self rather than to any integrated identity, and the

text Anato! mirrors the hero's embrace of multiplicity in a formal manner:
the philosophical subordination of hypotaxis gives way to Anato!'s use of
parataxis, the text frequently introduces apostrophe,20 and on a more global
level the development of an organic plot gives way to the episodic, to mul-
tiple and at least partially interchangeable scenes.23

One might suspect that Max is the voice of the one. After all, Max
raises a voice of protest when he finds Anato! with another woman on the
morning of his wedding. But making Max the voice of ethics, the voice of the
one, would be a mistaken enterprise. If marriage were sacred to Max, he
would have been upset over Anato!'s relationship with Elsa, a married wo-
man. But he is not. The problem seems to be an aesthetic one. While it is all
right for someone to have an affair after years of boredom, it just does not
look good to fool around on the morning of one’s wedding. The appeal is to
convention, not to truth: “So was tut man nicht!” (73). Even for Max aestheti-
cies is superior to ethics, appearance to essence. This reading is reinforced,
first, by Max’s encouraging Ilona to seduce Anatol as Max tries to keep her
from disturbing the wedding ceremony. Here again such a disruption would
be tasteless. Second, during the entire scene Max is concerned with an aes-
thetic matter: the matching of his flowers to the maid of honor’s dress. Third,
Max’s other moment of protest, “Das Leben ist nicht so!” (50), is undermined
at the end of this scene when he responds to Ilona’s “O dieser Hohn! . . .
Dieser Betrug!” with “Ist es das Leben!” (87). Finally, Max’s function in
the text as a whole is inherently aesthetic: he states: “Ich bin immer nur für
die Stichwörter dagewesen” (92).

Anatol wants truth, he wants a single relationship, he also wants perma-
nence. In a perverse way, one which nonetheless shows us that the truth of in-
constancy is constancy, the truth of impermanence permanence, Anatol does
reach this state. Changing constantly, Anatol is locked into the sameness of
change. Though in a state of flux, Anatol remains in a state of flux. Hof-
mannsthal speaks quite justly of “das Medusa’s Haupt” in Anatol.3 The rela-
tionships become formal and mechanical. The play illustrates the empty still-
ness of arbitrary change. The many is in truth one. This oneness in multi-
plicity, like Anatol’s permanent impermanence, is a synthetic truth at the
lowest level. Anatol reveals a further dialectic or reversal of freedom and necessity.

Like the tragic hero, Anatol would free himself of his limiting surroundings:
“Ich beginne ein neues Leben auf unbestimmte Zeit. Dazu muß ich frei und
allein sein, und darum löse ich mich von der Vergangenheit los!” (29). But, as
it turns out, Anatol is hardly free of his past or beyond any attachments.
Anatol is very much interested in the Bianca he once abandoned, and Max
responds, “Was geht es dich an? Du willst ja – frei und allein! sein!” (38). In
“Abschiedszwies” Anatol confidently tells Max that he and Annie are not
bound to one another: “Wir haben nicht die geringsten Verpflichtungen ge-
gemischt, wir sind frei!” (51). Not only is this notion of freedom still
governed by a law, but Anatol explicitly asserts in the course of the scene
that Annie has fulfilled her obligations to Anatol and to the relation-
ship. In each case Anatol is constrained, and it is the other who is free of him.

Though Anatol thinks he is free, he is determined in an abstract sense by his
longing for another and in a particular sense by his dependence on instants,
moods, and environment. Here again the play demonstrates a philosophical
reversal at the lowest level, in this case that the truth of freedom is necessity.
Anatol fails to recognize this truth, whether in its highest form as action
according to a priori principles or as the freedom to bind oneself to others.

For Anatol the night before his marriage is his last night of freedom: “Die
letzte Nacht der Freiheit” (75).

One can call Schnitzler’s play a comedy of underdeveloped intersub-
jectivity: Anatol has valid goals, at least momentarily, but falls because he is
in a position of such little insight that he cannot attain his goals. Intention
stands in disproportion to means. Contradictions remain, but the audience
recognizes the hero’s intuitive desire to resolve these contradictions. In this
form of comedy intersubjectivity is attained only at the lowest level: for ex-
ample, as a limited move towards recognition of the rights of the other (as in
Lessing’s Die Juden) or as forced friendship (as in Brecht’s Herr Puntila und
sein Knecht Matti). In Anatol we see love at the level of eroticism, truth at
the level of intention and convenience,39 permanence by way of Anatol’s
permanent impermanence, a stagnant oneness in multiplicity, and a determi-
nism that limits, rather than expands, the hero’s affirmation of freedom. Ana-
tol knows what he must do to reach his goals, but he is unwilling to draw the
consequences for his own behavior. The audience laughs at the disproportion
between Anatol’s longings and his actions. There is truth in the goal and
truth, by way of a negation of the negation, in the hero’s failings.

Anatol’s extreme subjectivity prevents the realization of his goals. But
the abstract truth of the play is not to be identified with Anatol’s illusions
and failure. The hero is ironized and his positions undermined not only in a
scene like “Episode” but throughout the text and especially when he asserts:
“zum Glück hab ich keine Illusionen . . .” (60). The text is aware of Anatol’s
inconsistencies in a way that the hero, with his vision restricted to the imme-

diate and present, is not. In a Baroque text, where we likewise see the di-

tehy that of truth and illusion, reality and appearance, a transcendent and
stable other is unequivocally invoked. In the 1890s one might think that
there are only illusions; there is no true world. But our ability to laugh at
Anatol and the text’s capacity to undermine his antics are possible only on the
basis of an other against which we can measure Anatol’s foibles. Schnitz-
ler’s negation of illusion (his negation of negativity) is constructed in such a
way that an alternative is posited even where it is not explicitly portrayed.

Otherwise, the critique of a life of illusions would be impossible. Positive
standards are invoked against which we measure Anatol’s contradictions and
which allow us to laugh at him. The text is an ironization of Anatol’s un-
tenable position, hardly an affirmation of the life of illusion, even if Anatol’s
stance is not unique, even if Anatol is representative of his society and his
age.

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NOTES

1 I use the term “intersubjectivity” to refer to subject-subject relations, that is, symmetrically structured interpersonal relations such as friendship or love. In its highest form intersubjectivity represents—to use a Hegelian expression—the identity of identity and difference.

2 Comparisons can be drawn here with Schnitzler’s story “Die drei Elixiere.” Here, too, is the desire for fidelity; the fear of letting one’s happy illusions dissolve coupled with a competing desire for truth; the intertwining of ennui and possession (symmetry) and possession (asymmetry); and the seeming impossibility of finding fidelity in the contemporary world.

3 In order to make my interpretation useful for students as well as critics I cite the convenient, yet reliable, Reclam edition of Anatol (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977).


5 Anatol’s subjectivity is related not only to the genre of comedy but to the age in which Schnitzler lived. As the objective world order appears to fall, as objective values seem no longer to hold, the focus shifts to the subject and the subject’s view of the world. The section “Agnosie,” with Anatol’s affirmation of an Endzeit, most clearly parallels Anatol and contemporary Vienna. The hero, like his society, turns away from the crumbling objective order to enjoy a fleeting and subjective moment of bliss. Precisely at the moment of denial, illusion becomes most attractive (63).

6 See, for example, 18, 32, 52, and 62.

7 I’m thinking not of Hans Kall but of characters such as Crescent, Virginius, Neuhoff, and above all Stani. Characters obsessed with their own subjectivity create misunderstandings even when words are not spoken, as in Act II, scenes 12 and 14 or Act III, scene 7.

8 Sandro Stica (“The Drama of Being and Seeming in Schnitzler’s ‘Anatol’” and Pirandello’s “Cosi è se vi pare,” “Journal of the International Arthur Schnitzler Research Association 5 (1966), pp. 4-28) views the play as a serious and genuine tragedy, rather than a parody of tragedy, and so misses an important dimension of the text. Admittedly, it is not easy to place Anatol or to determine exactly how one should perform the text: a performance that is too serious and brooding will miss the parody of tragedy; performances meanwhile that are either too gay or too ironic will miss Anatol’s genuine longing for intersubjectivity.

9 The reversals in action discussed below parallel Max’s mirroring back to Anatol his own words. The use of reversals or mirroring is extensive in comedy. It functions at times independently of the parody of tragedy. Lessing’s Minna von Barnhelm develops the theme of mirroring more fully than any comedy I know. Mirroring normally displays inconsistencies, specifically asymmetries, in the hero’s behavior; it thus leads the hero to self-awareness or, in some cases, serves to ironize his or her lack of self-awareness.

10 The complexity of “Episode” invites the question, why does Max avenge Anatol. Two reasons come to mind. First, Max shares a double standard of the times: men, not women, are free to treat the other as an object. Second, Schnitzler, through Max, wants to suggest that Anatol is intuitively higher than Bisca: Anatol at least desires the eternal.

11 Anatol’s freedom here from concrete economic concerns, his unhesitating toss of the black diamond into the fire, does not obscure his penchant for possession in a sphere beyond the literally economic.

12 This particular critique of Anatol presupposes of course that we view the individual scenes as one collective unit.

13 See also 24.

14 See also Swales, Arthur Schnitzler, p. 220.


16 Though Anatol refuses to ask the question primarily out of an unwillingness to face a truth that might upset his illusion of symmetry and secondarily out of the difficulties of finding just the right words, there is perhaps the implicit hint that Anatol wants not to treat the other as an object. This parallels Anatol’s intuitive desire for symmetry throughout the text.
Other obvious reminiscences of Goethe's Faust: Anatol, like Faust, thematizes the eternal moment; Anatol's "ich muß die Frage anders fassen" (13) echoes Faust's "ich muß es anders übersetzen" (1227); the Gretchenfrage is reduced to the hero's subjective "Frage an das Schicksal"; Anatol's women pass from saints to whores, but not, as with Gretchel, in the eyes of society, rather in Anatol's eye; Anatol speaks of "die kleine Welt" and "die große Welt" (21), not, however, as idyll and universe, but as suburb and city; finally, I cite Max's comment to Anatol from "Das Abenteuer seines Lebens"; "Männer wie du erwarten das Abenteuer ihres Lebens hundertmal, weil sie es hundertmal erleben; dann nicht befriedigt sind und wieder warten" (Offermanns, Anatol. Texte und Materialien zur Interpretation, p. 122).


It may appear that truth is not always singular; where two truths conflict, tragedy arises—at least according to the influential reading of Hegel. However, on a higher plane one can argue that the two truths are valid only as moments in a higher (and indeed singular) truth.

The final exchange between Max and Ilona recalls Anatol's earlier promise to Ilona as he prepares for his marriage: "Auf ein paar Stunden muß du mir Ulsaß geben" (76).

See 49 and 69.

Where Aristotle argues against episodic plots, as for example, in Euripides, one might make the case that the episodic element in Anatol is "inversely organic." It is necessary that the hero not progress. For an admirable attempt to demonstrate at least a limited order in Schnitzler's sequence of scenes see Jans Rückmann, Aufforich in die Modern: Die Anfänge des Jungen Wiens: Österreichische Literatur und Kritik im Fin de Siécle (Köln: Kovac, 1985), pp. 158-159.