

Suzanne Delange

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 11 May 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/589>

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Craig Christensen — 11 May 1998, 09:08

After reading Suzanne Delange I looked for Spanish Influenza information, to date when the characters were in high school. Of course I was surprised to learn that the Spanish Influenza occurred in 1918 during the first World War. This certainly doesn't seem to be the correct period for the characters' high school years. Interestingly, several sites made the observation that the epidemic has been almost completely wiped from the world's memory.

I took this quote from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/influenza/trackers.html>. Perhaps the quote by Mencken is the very quote that sparked the short story.

(quote) Those learning for the first time of the devastating consequences of the worldwide 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic--or pandemic--typically respond with two questions: How could they have never heard of a world-wide scourge that killed upwards of 30 million people? And, could it happen again?

Addressing the first question, journalist H.L. Mencken, offered this theory in 1956: "The epidemic is seldom mentioned, and most Americans have apparently forgotten it. This is not surprising. The human mind always tries to expunge the intolerable from memory, just as it tries to conceal it while current."(end-quote)

I think that the mention of the Spanish Influenza is a major clue to the nature of the story. The narrator has forgotten knowing Suzanne in the past; he hasn't simply failed to meet her. And his relationship with her was not minor, it was consequential.

I am willing to concede that the young lady may not be the narrator's daughter, but I still like the idea.

I have two questions for the group. First, what is the reference to Hamlet? And second, why the long rambling description of quilt collecting? In such a compact story it must have significance.

Peter Westlake — 11 May 1998, 13:35 · follows Craig Christensen

At 09:08 1998-05-11 -0500, Craig Christensen wrote:

...

I think that the mention of the Spanish Influenza is a major clue to the nature of the story. The narrator has forgotten knowing Suzanne in the past; he hasn't simply failed to meet her. And his relationship with her was not minor, it was consequential.

The fact that everyone has forgotten that flu epidemic is certainly very suggestive. At the very least it's a nice coincidence, and a great find - thanks!

I am willing to concede that the young lady may not be the narrator's daughter, but I still like the idea.

I have two questions for the group. First, what is the reference to Hamlet? And second, why the long rambling description of quilt collecting? In such a compact story it must have significance.

The Hamlet, at least, is easy:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

(Taken from the first copy of the text that came to hand, at <http://www.cs.uni.edu/~wallingf/teaching/052/projects/project03/hamlet.txt>). It's a very well-known quote (no offense!), hence "Hamlet's hackneyed precept".

I wondered about the quilts too. Misdirection? Some very subtle clue? They connect with the late eighteenth century, but I don't know what to make of that, if anything.

Peter.

Peter Westlake, Harlequin Ltd, Barrington Hall, Barrington, Cambs CB2 5RG.

Craig Christensen — 11 May 1998, 12:42 · follows Peter Westlake

Peter,

The Hamlet, at least, is easy:

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None taken. Yes, it is a very well-known quote, even to me. But, aren't there many familiar quotes from Hamlet? I haven't read the play for a couple of years and didn't make the effort to check it myself. I guess because I was so taken with the notion that forgetting was central to the story, I was trying to recall a quote about memory. Just for fun I searched hamlet.txt for "memory" and came upon this quote,

Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past...

There were other hits on "memory", but not quotes by Hamlet. It is taken out of context, and I don't know if it is familiar enough to be "hackneyed". Kind of interesting though, huh? I should search for "forget", too.

I wondered about the quilts too. Misdirection? Some very subtle clue? They connect with the late eighteenth century, but I don't know what to make of that, if anything.

This was exactly what I was thinking. I sometimes think Wolfe is like a stage magician, drawing your eye away from the truth in a scene with interesting, but less essential action and dialogue.

Craig Christensen — 11 May 1998, 13:13 · follows Craig Christensen

Adam,

The girl he sees isn't his own daughter--I can't see the narrator as being in his early thirties-

Thank-you for the thorough explanation of this short story. You have convinced me with simple math that the narrator is not the father of the young lady at the end.

Alga,

The flavor of regret is bittersweet.

Yes, I thought that the overall tone of the story was "regret".

William,

What TBotNS really needs (for scholarly purposes anyway) is a thorough, comprehensive and intelligently designed index.

The same thought occurred to me as I read through the archives. I had the thought that if a scholarly member of the group devised a format, then other members could submit summaries of chapters as they re-read them. They could include characters, settings, new ideas presented, reoccurring themes, vocabulary, limited quotations, etc. Done as a group, you Wolfe scholars should be able to produce a searchable reference document in a short time. Count me in.

Craig