

# Short Story 87: The Detective of Dreams

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 11 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6608>

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Marc Aramini — 11 Aug 2014, 02:59

"The Detective of Dreams" first appeared in *\*Dark Forces\** in 1980. It is recollected in *\*Endangered Species\**.

SUMMARY: A man identifying himself as Herr D? enters the narrator's office on the rue Madeleine, probably in Paris, and hires him to get to the bottom of a series of dreams, for which his offered reward reeks of hyperbole: "Find and destroy the Dream-Master — and you shall sit upon a chair of gold, if that is your wish, and eat from a table of gold as well." The narrator reveals that he knows the real identity of Herr D--, which is that of Baron H? of the secret police of K--.

The narrator makes his preparations, pinches his female assistant Andree, and leaves by train across the Alps to arrive at the station of I--. He makes his way to his first contact, a woman who sells lacey dresses in a stripped and compartmentalized ex-church, now housing a series of small shops and booths. He encounters Fraulein A--, who tells him of her fine dresses and tries to suppress tears. The narrator expresses surprise at her single status, and Fraulein A-- reveals she has no interest in men or women. When pressed, she reveals her nightly repeating dream (also mentioning Freud)? she passes through a narrow gate and sees a sumptuous feast, but she is dressed in only a plain dress such as she works in, and she is cast out by a man she seems to recognize, who is tall, robed like a king, and wears a strange crown (probably of thorns). She is cast out into the garden, where she smells a terrible beast, and wakes up. No matter what she wears to sleep, the dream is the same.

He then goes to discuss the dreams with another victim, Herr R--, a banker. He tells of his youth selling cabbage leaf rolls and how he has not put his mother up in the finest house in Lindau, and reveals that in his dream the Dream-Master has hurt his hand. In his dreams, he is an important man who is summoned by the owner of a large and opulent house, the same as in Fraulein A--'s dream, to an accounting. He is told that he owes a certain sum he cant remember, then begs and weeps for mercy. He says, "several times I have told him that I am a wealthy man in this world, and that if only he would permit me to make payment in its currency, I would do so immediately." The master replies, "That is a dream — you must know it by now. You cannot expect to pay a rel debt with the currency of sleep." After Herr R-- falls at his feet like a child, the master says, "You would never be able to pay all you owe, and you are a false and dishonest servant. But your debt is forgiven, forever." Herr R-- goes to burn the ledger page that contains his debt, but is met with another servant, who owes him a trifling sum, and he seizes him by the throat and demands payment. The owner sees him in disapproval, and the dream ends with a door to the chamber being opened by a vile, reptilian hand that strikes Herr R-- with dread.

The next day our narrator meets with Baron H-- again and demands to know who is really behind the inquiry, and it is revealed that the countess of the province herself is having nightmares. Her husband fears assassination, and the narrator goes to see her and here of her dream, in which her husband is going to hold an execution in the garden which mirrors Christ's

crucifixion, with modern weapons. She begs her husband not to, for she sees that the reflection of the count in the Dream-Master's eyes is the real count. At the end of the dream, the count gives the order to continue, and "the soldiers fire. The Dream-Master falls forward, though his bonds hold him to the tree. And Karl flies to bloody rags beside me."

The detective determines that they all cross the main street, the Hauptstrasse, at approximately the same point, and he goes there to observe. Eventually, he himself feels observed. Finally, he realizes the identity of the Dream-Master. "The stupidity, the wonderful stupidity of myself, who had not recognized his old stories! ? For the Dream-Master had set up His own picture, and full length and in the most gorgeous colors, in his window. He goes into the church and the priest gives him communion: ?I knelt, and there — I destroyed the Dream-Master as He has been sacrificed so often, devouring his white, wheaten flesh that we might all possess life without end. Dear people, dream on."

#### COMMENTARY:

Wolfe has listed "The Detective of Dreams" as one of his favorite short stories in a few interviews; here, the didactic message is easily discernible to those with any familiarity of the parables of Jesus of Nazareth. The victims of the Dream-Master see His face frequently but are unable to recognize it in their dreams, instead seeking a physical cause for their terrors. This lack of familiarity with the spiritual grants their visions the quality of terror — and it is the endings of the dreams that allow a more horrific message to creep into the story — the looming threat of their fears realized, a nameless terror almost as eldritch as the fantasy of Lovecraft. This is especially clear in the dreams of the banker Herr R--, who sees a little more of the creature's arm each day as the door to damnation opens bit by bit, inexorably. He wants to stop it, but cannot comprehend the spiritual change necessary to impede the opening door of damnation because he is too much a part of this world, which, at least in this story, is but a dream of the spiritual reality.

Underneath the story lies the certainty of the encroachment of the modern world on hallowed traditions: the church has become partitioned shops, the great house of the nobility has become a bank, and, all too soon, the monarchy and nobility of Germany will shatter, too, with Austria and Prussia and all these nations changed and perhaps even dissolved as World War II comes to shake the earth.

What are the failings of these individuals? Fraulein A lives without love; her chastity is sterile, and she feels little affection for either women or men. Her attempt to put on a dress worthy of the wedding does not hide that she herself has no appreciation for the symbolic love behind the wedding ceremony. Herr R?has gotten by on understanding men to exploit their psychological whims, a banker who does not have a sense for numbers. Even though the parable lists the debts at ten thousand talents, he can never remember what he owes, for it is kindness, forgiveness, and a surrender of profit that he truly owes, something he cannot put into words or wrap his mind around.

In his dream we see the concept of demons as servants of God: "I am aware that the owner possesses certain other servants, who have never been under my direction — they are hideous, vile, and cruel; I know too that he thinks me but little better than they, and that as he permits me to serve him, so he allows them to serve him also."

The Countess' dream has its own form of punishment that is more certain than the slowly opening door of Herr R--: since the Count will have no mercy, this quality prompts his own explosion.

The dualistic world view Wolfe presents is nowhere more clearly stated than in the dream of the Countess von V--: "In my dream quite suddenly, his eyes seem far, far larger than mine, and far more beautiful, and in them I see reflected the figure of my husband — it is his reflection, and not the man who stands near me, who is the real Karl. The man I have thought real is only a reflection of that reflection."

It is tempting to relegate "The Detective of Dreams" to nothing but an exegesis of superstitious faith, a celebration of that mystery, that, to those steeped in the iconography and history of the Church, is obvious. The identity of the Dream-Master with the Eucharist is taken quite literally - "This is My Body, which will be given up for you." It represents a sacrifice for salvation that is reenacted with every taking of communion, one which is lost as these various individuals continue to exercise their will and desires and see the warnings as secular threats rather than a call to a different kind of reformation.

## LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Especially in 18th and 19th century fiction, the practice of replacing character names with a letter, such as Squire B?in Richardson's *\*Pamela\** (recast as Squire Booby in Fielding's *\*Shamela\**), was quite common, and the motivation for doing so has several explanations. One is to lend the story universality — devoid of place names and given names, the characters, and especially the settings, can become any place without the author having to make sure every intersection in the story is properly placed. Dickens in particular eschewed this practice, but here the model most obviously in play is Poe's "The Purloined Letter", which never names its influential cast, from the prefect of police, G--, to the amoral minister, D--. The hero, Dupin, uses the methods of logic and deduction coupled with a creative imagination to solve mysteries, and also lives in Paris.

The other reason for the elided proper names is derivative of the early conceit of the realistic novel, that the actual events were something like a memoir or happenstance that, to protect those involved or avoid scandal, replaced the names with letters. Why then does Wolfe use this technique, but give the first name of Count Karl von V--? In addition, we have a German speaking community near the alps accessible via train in a time after Freud's publications and the death of an Emperor, so the concealment only works to a certain degree of exactness.

It is interesting that only in his current case does the detective of dreams omit names, as he boasts of his previous credentials with full names, which are touched on below.

More frustrating, however, is the difficulty of placing the story completely in a setting because of these almost random letters, and, even though it might be a waste of time, we will examine this more below. It might be that the letters are arbitrary, though we do know that Herr R puts his mother up in Lindau, in Bavaria (which does have a part of the Alps within its borders). Near Lindau is a small city called Immenstadt which has a train station, but none of the other letters seem to match up unless we transport the action to Austria — it seems that the theme, that this world is the dream, makes the setting less important than the "real" waking world — the spiritual one.

Even though it is commonly regarded as a 19th century detective tale, it is actually set in the early parts of the 20th century before World War II forever changed the ideological landscape, and this transitional point is one of the themes — the characters are approaching the modern world in their understanding and concerns, and they are faced with a spiritual puzzle they are ill equipped to deal with.

Perhaps an additional reference is to the work of Chesterton, especially *The Everlasting Man*, which Wolfe mentions in his afterword to the story in *\*The Best of Gene Wolfe\**. *\*There are a few interesting passages about dreams in Chesterton's text:*

Out of some dark forest under some ancient dawn there must come towards us, with lumbering yet dancing motions, one of the very queerest of the prehistoric creatures. We must see for the first time the strangely small head set on a neck not only longer but thicker than itself, as the face of a gargoyle is thrust out — the feet, each like a solid club of horn, alone amid the feet of so many cattle so that the true fear is to be found in showing, not the cloven, but the uncloven hoof. Nor is it mere verbal fancy to see him thus as a unique monster — but the point is that when we see him thus as the first man saw him, we begin once more to have some imaginative sense of what it meant when the first man rode him. In such a dream he may seem ugly, but he does not seem unimpressive; and certainly that two legged dwarf who could get on top of him will not seem unimpressive. — In other words, I say it is better to see a horse as a monster than to see it only as a slow substitute for a motor-car.

I am convinced that if we could tell the supernatural story of Christ word for word as of a Chinese hero, all him the Son of Heaven instead of the Son of God, and trace his rayed nimbus in the gold tread of Chinese embroideries or the gold lacquer of Chinese potter, instead of in the gold leaf of our own old Catholic paintings, there would be a unanimous testimony to the spiritual purity of the story. (from Chesterton's Preface to *\*The Everlasting Man\**)

Removed from his religious context and put in a nightmare, Christ invokes that strange terror that the image of a horse might in a dream when all its strangeness is actually clarified.

## BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

Wolfe seems attracted to the idea of Christ as a teller of instructional stories, which are here recast as dreams with ominous implications. The stigmata in his hands from the crucifixion are obvious, and the majority of these scenes can be easily found as parables in the gospel of Matthew, though there is a significant overlap in content in the synoptic gospels.

Fraulein A's dream is from the parable of the wedding banquet, found in Matthew 22:1-14, quoted below from the New King James Version, but her dream starts with the garden and gate: "it's not a large gate for wagons or carriages, but a small one, so narrow I can hardly get through. Have you read the writings of Dr. Freud of Vienna" — I am sure he would say that entering that gate meant sexual commerce. This talk of a gate involves the start of Matthew 7:13-14 -

13Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *\*is\** the gate and broad *\*is\** the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14Because narrow *\*is\** the gate and difficult *\*is\** the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The narrator is quick to dismiss the possibility of sexual repression, for the Fraulein's problem is quite the opposite — an asexuality born of indifference to humanity. Here is the parable of the wedding banquet:

22And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2?The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, ?See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *\*are\** killed, and all things *\*are\** ready. Come to the wedding." 5But they

made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6And the rest seized his servants, treated \*them\* spitefully, and killed \*them.\* 7But when the king heard \*about it,\* he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding." 10So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding \*hall\* was filled with guests.

11?But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12So he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. 13Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast \*him\* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

14?For many are called, but few \*are\* chosen.

Fraulein A's ending puts a far more sinister and implied threat into the outer darkness, which has encroached upon the garden around the estate: "some terrible beast has entered the garden. I smell it — like the hyena cage at the Tiergarten — as the door opens. And then I wake up."

The banker Herr R??s dream is from the parable of the unforgiving servant, found in Matthew 18:21-35 -

21Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him" Up to seven times?

22Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ?Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." 27Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28?But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took \*him\* by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" 29So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." 30And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" 34And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35?So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

While the banker is incapable of remembering the sum of ten thousand talents, it seems that there are also other things he owes the Dream Master — mercy, forgiveness, and compassion for his fellow man. The difference in both of these parables is that, beyond a secular

punishment, we see the promise of hell:

The throne of gold that Baron H-- offered our narrator might also echo Matthew 19: 28-30, presaging the narrator's consumption of the body of Christ.

28So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30But many \*who are\* first will be last, and the last first.

Chapter 7 of the Gospel of Matthew holds many of the themes which are found in the dream of the Count (it is reprinted in its entirety in the discussion of "Many Mansions.")

The damnation we see threatened in the dreams certainly has biblical precedent, as in Matthew 25:41-46-

41"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."

44"Then they also will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" 45Then He will answer them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do \*it\* to one of the least of these, you did not do \*it\* to Me." 46And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

## THE LETTERS AND THE SETTING

If the late emperor of which our narrator speaks of for popularizing the beard and mustache is Franz Joseph, then the text actually seems to be set in the early 20th century, as Franz died in 1916 (but he did rule from 1848 to 1916 as Emperor). This could very well make our area a state in Austria if the letters are accurate at all, probably the state of Karnten/Carinthia, with Klagenfurt its capital. Klagenfurt had a large train stop on the Vienna-Trieste railway which was destroyed in World War II. However, the problem with this is that they are not as close to the Alps or Lindau as Immenstadt, mentioned above, was, and perhaps Klagenfurt is too large (though it has some interesting local stories, since its name means the ford of complaint — one legend says that an innocent apprentice was executed over a theft that wound up being a mistake, and that the lament of the people when they found out rang out, thus the name of the town). However, the setting might be forever open to speculation.

The only name that is given amongst those involved is that of Karl, the husband of the Countess. Karl means free man, and it is this freedom of choice between good and evil that is implicit in Wolfe's Christian fiction. He could select mercy.

D--: The Baron in disguise who hires the detective to hunt the dream master, he is also the head of the secret police. This is his mother's name and the reason he selected the pseudonym.

H--: The Baron's true name

K--: The city, state, or principality which the Baron represents. Could be Klagenfurt (the city) or Karnten (the state) in Austria.

I--: the city or station name which used to be the capital of a province (I cannot determine this with any accuracy, unless it simply implies the Inner Stadt district, unless it is perhaps Immenstadt in Bavaria rather than Austria)

J--: now a province of K — (could be Jezersko, which was a part of Karnten)

A--: A rather asexual Fraulein who makes dresses and receives the dream of the wedding guests

M--: an antique dealer who handles chairs and chests

O--: an antique dealer who stocks pictures

G--: A Frau who calls Fraulein A a manhater for not receiving her son

R--: A banker who grew up on the streets and made his fortune by understanding men rather than numbers (Raffgier is one possible German word for greed, but no other letters seem to echo the traits on display)

V--: The Count and Countess, though it is the Countess von V?who dreams that her husband Karl is executing the dream master.

Fraulein A indicates that the police working under Baron H?are not “our” police — this could very well show the strange position Austria occupied at this time, though the city is probably in Germany (or might even be in Switzerland from the details that we have, though that is the least likely possibility).

#### THE DETECTIVES PREVIOUS CASES:

Paulette Renan — our narrator found the quince seed in her throat — Paulette = little, Renan = (seal)? ? early mythical and historical references to apples may have actually referred to the quince, and the quince seed, if eaten in large quantities, actually can produce hydrogen cyanide and be toxic. (The quince might have been the actual forbidden fruit in the story of Adam and Eve, and thus has a special place in the concept of original sin, which necessitated the presence of Christ in history, the “new” Adam).

Captain Brotte — which means bread, discusses his finds amid the Antarctic ice, an unexplored region, and his name, bread certainly resonates with the Eucharist.

Herr R-- says that he knows of the narrator because of a case concerning a mummy, and what is a mummy but an attempt to preserve the body for the afterlife?

Joan gift from god O?Neil — grandson of Niall (which could mean cloud/champion), she lived behind a painting of herself (this echoes the reflection of the Count in Christ's eyes, in which the reflection was more “real” than the physical form visible to the eye).

All these cases can in some way liken back to a Christian mystery or an attempt to pierce the veil of the unknown.

#### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

Is this a town in Austria, as I have assumed, or in Bavaria proper or even the Swiss Alps? The Count von V — answers only to the Queen Regent (there was a prince regent in Bavaria during this time period, and we definitely have trains), a Queen Regent I cannot seem to locate in early 20th century history near Germany. Can we place the date and city with more exactitude, and is the identification of the “late” emperor who popularized a certain kind of mustache and beard not Franz Joseph I, who died in 1916? From the mention of Freud, who did not publish his *\*Interpretation of Dreams\** until 1899-1900 and did not have his group meetings until the early parts of the 20th century, this story is actually a 20th century tale, but is definitely set before World War II. Could it be after World War I? I feel as if the dissolution of German monarchs in 1918, with its kingdoms of Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, Saxony, and Wurttemberg is definitely yet to come (what a mess those nations were, making placement of this city almost impossible — setting a fairly narrow window of time in which the action could occur.)

When Fraulein A-- says “they are not our police”, does she refer to the fact that they do not work for the people, or that they are a foreign occupying force?

Why are the dreams striking this city in particular? Is there a larger reason for the substantiation of divine warning here? Could it be related to the events that are about to occur in German history and the widespread persecution of the Jews? Or are we to see it as individual warnings?

#### CONNECTION TO OTHER WORKS:

The overtly Christian works are rarely as unabashed as “The Detective of Dreams”, and certainly this has much in common with his Sherlock Holmes pastiches, though it is more serious. This story's metaphysical underpinnings in which the spiritual world has more of reality than our physical world can also be found in “Trip, Trap.”

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Aug 2014, 03:05 · in reply to Marc Aramini

This is probably my favorite Wolfe short story, and the first I read. It blew the top of my head off.

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#### LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Especially in 18th and 19th century fiction, the practice of replacing character names with a letter, such as Squire B? in Richardson's *\*Pamela\** (recast as Squire Booby in Fielding's *\*Shamela\**), was quite common, and

the motivation for doing so has several explanations. One is to lend the story universality — devoid of place names and given names, the characters, and especially the settings, can become any place without the author having to make sure every intersection in the story is properly placed. Dickens in particular eschewed this practice, but here the model most obviously in play is Poe's "The Purloined Letter", which never names its influential cast, from the prefect of police, G--, to the amoral minister, D--. The hero, Dupin, uses the methods of logic and deduction coupled with a creative imagination to solve mysteries, and also lives in Paris.

The other reason for the elided proper names is derivative of the early conceit of the realistic novel, that the actual events were something like a memoir or happenstance that, to protect those involved or avoid scandal, replaced the names with letters. Why then does Wolfe use this technique, but give the first name of Count Karl von V--? In addition, we have a German speaking community near the alps accessible via train in a time after Freud's publications and the death of an Emperor, so the concealment only works to a certain degree of exactness.

It is interesting that only in his current case does the detective of dreams omit names, as he boasts of his previous credentials with full names, which are touched on below.

More frustrating, however, is the difficulty of placing the story completely in a setting because of these almost random letters, and, even though it might be a waste of time, we will examine this more below. It might be that the letters are arbitrary, though we do know that Herr R puts his mother up in Lindau, in Bavaria (which does have a part of the Alps within its borders). Near Lindau is a small city called Immenstadt which has a train station, but none of the other letters seem to match up unless we transport the action to Austria — it seems that the theme, that this world is the dream, makes the setting less important than the "real" waking world — the spiritual one.

Even though it is commonly regarded as a 19th century detective tale, it is actually set in the early parts of the 20th century before World War II forever changed the ideological landscape, and this transitional point is one of the themes — the characters are approaching the modern world in their understanding and concerns, and they are faced with a spiritual puzzle they are ill equipped to deal with.

Perhaps an additional reference is to the work of Chesterton, especially *The Everlasting Man*, which Wolfe mentions in his afterword to the story in *\*The Best of Gene Wolfe*. \*There are a few interesting passages about dreams in Chesterton's text:

Out of some dark forest under some ancient dawn there must come towards us, with lumbering yet dancing motions, one of the very queerest of the prehistoric creatures. We must see for the first time the strangely small head set on a neck not only longer but thicker than itself, as the face of a gargoyle is thrust out — the feet, each like a solid club of horn, alone amid the feet of so many cattle so that the true fear is to be found in showing, not the cloven, but the uncloven hoof. Nor is it mere verbal fancy to see him thus as a unique monster — but the point is that when we see him thus as the first man saw him, we begin once more to have some imaginative sense of what it meant when the first man rode him. In such a dream he may seem ugly, but he does not seem unimpressive; and certainly that two legged

dwarf who could get on top of him will not seem unimpressive. — In other words, I say it is better to see a horse as a monster than to see it only as a slow substitute for a motor-car.

I am convinced that if we could tell the supernatural story of Christ word for word as of a Chinese hero, all him the Son of Heaven instead of the Son of God, and trace his rayed nimbus in the gold tread of Chinese embroideries or the gold lacquer of Chinese potter, instead of in the gold leaf of our own old Catholic paintings, there would be a unanimous testimony to the spiritual purity of the story. (from Chesterton's Preface to *The Everlasting Man*)

Removed from his religious context and put in a nightmare, Christ invokes that strange terror that the image of a horse might in a dream when all its strangeness is actually clarified.

#### BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

Wolfe seems attracted to the idea of Christ as a teller of instructional stories, which are here recast as dreams with ominous implications. The stigmata in his hands from the crucifixion are obvious, and the majority of these scenes can be easily found as parables in the gospel of Matthew, though there is a significant overlap in content in the synoptic gospels.

Fraulein A's dream is from the parable of the wedding banquet, found in Matthew 22:1-14, quoted below from the New King James Version, but her dream starts with the garden and gate: "it's not a large gate for wagons or carriages, but a small one, so narrow I can hardly get through. Have you read the writings of Dr. Freud of Vienna" — I am sure he would say that entering that gate meant sexual commerce. This talk of a gate involves the start of Matthew 7:13-14 -

13Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The narrator is quick to dismiss the possibility of sexual repression, for the Fraulein's problem is quite the opposite — an asexuality born of indifference to humanity. Here is the parable of the wedding banquet:

22And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.'" 5But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*.\* 7But when the king heard *about it*,\* he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding." 10So those servants went out into the highways and

gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding  
\*hall\* was filled with guests.

11?But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who  
did not have on a wedding garment. 12So he said to him, "Friend, how did  
you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. 13Then  
the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast  
\*him\* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

14?For many are called, but few \*are\* chosen.

Fraulein A's ending puts a far more sinister and implied threat into the  
outer darkness, which has encroached upon the garden around the estate:  
"some terrible beast has entered the garden. I smell it — like the hyena  
cage at the Tiergarten — as the door opens. And then I wake up."

The banker Herr R's dream is from the parable of the unforgiving  
servant, found in Matthew 18:21-35 -

21Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin  
against me, and I forgive him" Up to seven times?

22Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to  
seventy times seven. 23Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain  
king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24And when he had  
begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand  
talents. 25But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be  
sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be  
made. 26The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have  
patience with me, and I will pay you all." 27Then the master of that  
servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28?But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who  
owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took \*him\* by  
the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" 29So his fellow servant fell  
down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will  
pay you all." 30And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till  
he should pay the debt. 31So when his fellow servants saw what had been  
done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had  
been done. 32Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You  
wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33Should  
you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity  
on you?" 34And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers  
until he should pay all that was due to him.

35?So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his  
heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

While the banker is incapable of remembering the sum of ten thousand  
talents, it seems that there are also other things he owes the Dream Master  
? mercy, forgiveness, and compassion for his fellow man. The difference in

both of these parables is that, beyond a secular punishment, we see the promise of hell:

The throne of gold that Baron H-- offered our narrator might also echo Matthew 19: 28-30, presaging the narrator's consumption of the body of Christ.

28So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Chapter 7 of the Gospel of Matthew holds many of the themes which are found in the dream of the Count (it is reprinted in its entirety in the discussion of "Many Mansions.")

The damnation we see threatened in the dreams certainly has biblical precedent, as in Matthew 25:41-46-

41"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."

44"Then they also will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" 45Then He will answer them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do \*it\* to one of the least of these, you did not do \*it\* to Me." 46And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

## THE LETTERS AND THE SETTING

If the late emperor of which our narrator speaks of for popularizing the beard and mustache is Franz Joseph, then the text actually seems to be set in the early 20th century, as Franz died in 1916 (but he did rule from 1848 to 1916 as Emperor). This could very well make our area a state in Austria if the letters are accurate at all, probably the state of Karnten/Carinthia, with Klagenfurt its capital. Klagenfurt had a large train stop on the Vienna-Trieste railway which was destroyed in World War II. However, the problem with this is that they are not as close to the Alps or Lindau as Immenstadt, mentioned above, was, and perhaps Klagenfurt is too large (though it has some interesting local stories, since its name means the ford of complaint — one legend says that an innocent apprentice was executed over a theft that wound up being a mistake, and that the lament of the people when they found out rang out, thus the name of the town). However, the setting might be forever open to speculation.

The only name that is given amongst those involved is that of Karl, the

husband of the Countess. Karl means free man, and it is this freedom of choice between good and evil that is implicit in Wolfe's Christian fiction. He could select mercy.

D--: The Baron in disguise who hires the detective to hunt the dream master, he is also the head of the secret police. This is his mother's name and the reason he selected the pseudonym.

H--: The Baron's true name

K--: The city, state, or principality which the Baron represents. Could be Klagenfurt (the city) or Karnten (the state) in Austria.

I--: the city or station name which used to be the capital of a province (I cannot determine this with any accuracy, unless it simply implies the Inner Stadt district, unless it is perhaps Immenstadt in Bavaria rather than Austria)

J--: now a province of K — (could be Jezersko, which was a part of Karnten)

A--: A rather asexual Fraulein who makes dresses and receives the dream of the wedding guests

M--: an antique dealer who handles chairs and chests

O--: an antique dealer who stocks pictures

G--: A Frau who calls Fraulein A a manhater for not receiving her son

R--: A banker who grew up on the streets and made his fortune by understanding men rather than numbers (Raffgier is one possible German word for greed, but no other letters seem to echo the traits on display)

V--: The Count and Countess, though it is the Countess von V?who dreams that her husband Karl is executing the dream master.

Fraulein A indicates that the police working under Baron H?are not "our" police — this could very well show the strange position Austria occupied at this time, though the city is probably in Germany (or might even be in Switzerland from the details that we have, though that is the least likely possibility).

#### THE DETECTIVES PREVIOUS CASES:

Paulette Renan — our narrator found the quince seed in her throat ?  
Paulette = little, Renan = (seal)? ? early mythical and historical references to apples may have actually referred to the quince, and the quince seed, if eaten in large quantities, actually can produce hydrogen cyanide and be toxic. (The quince might have been the actual forbidden fruit in the story of Adam and Eve, and thus has a special place in the concept of original sin, which necessitated the presence of Christ in history, the "new" Adam).

Captain Brotte — which means bread, discusses his finds amid the Antarctic ice, an unexplored region, and his name, bread certainly resonates with the Eucharist.

Herr R-- says that he knows of the narrator because of a case concerning a mummy, and what is a mummy but an attempt to preserve the body for the afterlife?

Joan gift from god O?Neil — grandson of Niall (which could mean cloud/champion), she lived behind a painting of herself (this echoes the reflection of the Count in Christ's eyes, in which the reflection was more "real" than the physical form visible to the eye).

All these cases can in some way liken back to a Christian mystery or an attempt to pierce the veil of the unknown.

#### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

Is this a town in Austria, as I have assumed, or in Bavaria proper or even the Swiss Alps? The Count von V — answers only to the Queen Regent (there was a prince regent in Bavaria during this time period, and we definitely have trains), a Queen Regent I cannot seem to locate in early 20th century history near Germany. Can we place the date and city with more exactitude, and is the identification of the "late" emperor who popularized a certain kind of mustache and beard not Franz Joseph I, who died in 1916? From the mention of Freud, who did not publish his \*Interpretation of Dreams\* until 1899-1900 and did not have his group meetings until the early parts of the 20th century, this story is actually a 20th century tale, but is definitely set before World War II. Could it be after World War I? I feel as if the dissolution of German monarchs in 1918, with its kingdoms of Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, Saxony, and Wurrtenberg is definitely yet to come (what a mess those nations were, making placement of this city almost impossible — setting a fairly narrow window of time in which the action could occur.)

When Fraulein A-- says "they are not our police", does she refer to the fact that they do not work for the people, or that they are a foreign occupying force?

Why are the dreams striking this city in particular? Is there a larger reason for the substantiation of divine warning here? Could it be related to the events that are about to occur in German history and the widespread persecution of the Jews? Or are we to see it as individual warnings?

#### CONNECTION TO OTHER WORKS:

The overtly Christian works are rarely as unabashed as "The Detective of Dreams", and certainly this has much in common with his Sherlock Holmes pastiches, though it is more serious. This story's metaphysical underpinnings in which the spiritual world has more of reality than our physical world can also be found in "Trip, Trap."

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Marc Aramini — 11 Aug 2014, 03:16 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I have always been sensitive to religious allusions, especially ones that are similar to the almost voodoo Catholicism of my rather uneducated (but not ignorant) grandmother, and the Detective of Dreams kind of summons that fearful candle lighting literal symbolism I think runs a bit further underground in a lot of Wolfe's work. I remember being a young child and wondering why the conciliator wasn't the reconciliator, especially with that temptation in the wilderness

scene of Typhon lifted almost line by line from the bible.

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Gerry Quinn — 11 Aug 2014, 11:41 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 11/08/2014 03:59, Marc Aramini wrote:

Why are the dreams striking this city in particular? Is there a larger reason for the substantiation of divine warning here? Could it be related to the events that are about to occur in German history and the widespread persecution of the Jews? Or are we to see it as individual warnings?

Good question. The warnings seem initially to be aimed at individuals, but one could argue that there is a progression from a purely personal fault (Fraulein A\_) to a materialism which affects society (the banker) to the brutality of rulers (Karl's wife and her dream of the gallows "which is not really in the back garden, of course".)

But it's hard to see why a particular city could be all that relevant. The stories of the Dream Master are universal, after all.

As for its location, I get an Austrian feel, I assume we are set in the late days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

- Gerry Quinn

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Gerry Quinn — 11 Aug 2014, 11:43 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On 11/08/2014 04:05, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

This is probably my favorite Wolfe short story, and the first I read.  
It blew the top of my head off.

One can see why Wolfe is proud of it. Pass it to the most militant atheist, and he would have to admit that his Devil has some of the best tunes.

- Gerry Quinn