



# The Empty Mirror

*J. Sydney Jones*

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The summer of 1898 finds Austria terrorized by a killer who the press calls "Vienna's Jack the Ripper." Four bodies have already been found, but when the painter Gustav Klimt's female model becomes the fifth victim, the police finger him as the culprit. The artist has already scandalized Viennese society with his erotically charged modern paintings. Who better to take the blame for the crimes that have plagued the city?

This is, however, far from an open-and-shut case. Klimt's lawyer, Karl Werthen, has an ace up his sleeve. Dr. Hans Gross, the renowned father of criminology, has agreed to assist him in investigating the murders. Together, Gross and Werthen must not only clear Klimt's name but also follow the trail of a killer that will lead them in the most surprising of directions. By uncovering the cause of the crimes that have shaken the city, the two men may risk damaging Vienna more than the murders did themselves.

Written by an acclaimed expert on Vienna and its history, *The Empty Mirror* introduces a new series of stunning historical mysteries that reveals the culture and curiosities of this fascinating fin de siècle metropolis.

## The Empty Mirror Details

Date : Published January 8th 2008 by Minotaur Books

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Author : J. Sydney Jones

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# From Reader Review The Empty Mirror for online ebook

## Mary Ronan Drew says

Books set in Vienna always, eventually, get to the food. Sacher tortes and coffees of various kinds, sausages, spaetzle, and of course schlagsahne. (The only German I know is "mit schlagsahne, bitte.")

J Sydney Jones' The Empty Mirror is a mystery in which a former criminal attorney, Karl Werthen (now practicing what seems to be property transfer law or something similarly boring), and a famed criminologist, Dr Hans Gross, team up to prove that Werthen's friend, Gustav Klimt, is innocent of a string of gruesome murders. Every two weeks or so another mutilated body turns up in the Prader (something else that tends to pop up sooner or later in Vienna novels.)

When another person is murdered whilst Klimt is in jail he is released but the two friends are now committed to solving the mystery. All of the murders are so exactly alike it has to be a single person perpetrating them. Fortunately, Gross has a colleague high up in the police administration of the city and he is acquainted with Richard Freiherr von Kraft-Ebbing, the chair of the psychiatry department at the University of Vienna. The two detectives therefore have access to the cadavers and records and they have their profiler.

As they trace the weapon used on each victim and begin to see a pattern in the murders the case is suddenly closed by the apparent suicide of a man who writes a confession. But things are not what they seem and a few weeks later the sleuths are back on the trail, this time with the complication of the assassination of the empress to consider.

At first glance this isn't as good as the series by Frank Tallis which begins with A Death in Vienna (aka Mortal Mischief), but it's the first book and I expect Jones will get into the swing of things with another book. I enjoy almost any novel set in Vienna, especially if it comes mit schlagsahne.

It would be extremely helpful to read this book with a map of Vienna at hand.

2011 No 16

Coming soon: The Brontes went to Woolworths

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## Gretchen says

Excellent find! I look forward to continuing with this series.

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## Alan Swift says

Turn of the century Vienna is becoming a popular location for historical crime fiction and this novel was just about on par with those of Frank Tallis. At times the educational dialogue about Vienna and the Austro-Hungarian Empire is overdone but the characters of Werthen and Gross are likeable and the repartee is amusing. The plot was at times over complex and scarcely believable but given the author's work to draw

into the story so many historical characters he can be forgiven for that. In point of fact his melding of fact and fiction is ingenious. At one part of the book I felt it was getting into the treacle but the last third upped the pace and we had a rip roaring denouement. In truth I wasn't that bothered about which Mr Big was behind the mystery but the ending was very cleverly teased out and I can imagine that I will want to sit in a Viennese pastry shop (so to speak) with Werthen and Gross at some time in the future! Good entertainment.

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## **Rebecca says**

A historic woven mystery with captivating characters and a well built backdrop for a future to come.

For a book I continuously put off, it was a delightful little read! Not only had I thought I solved the "initial" mystery, (some aspects) but I was taken on a crisscross written tour of Vienna. The author so beautifully ties in the time, place, and characters with history that I found myself continuously pausing to look up and research other avenues of knowledge.

I enjoy a good mystery (sadly many fall victim to a dull middle chase before a subpar crack at a climactic finish...I did not find that to be the case in this book) and when there is a history I knew little of to be learned from and so wittingly introduced to by way of story, well, I think the author has done a fantastic job! A series I plan on continuing.

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## **Tony says**

Jones, J. Sydney. *THE EMPTY MIRROR: A Viennese Mystery*. (2009). \*\*1/2. The author is an expert on Vienna and things Viennese. He has written guidebooks for the city and a history of the city. He has chosen to set this mystery, his first, in Vienna in 1898. The city is being terrorized by a serial killer, called "Vienna's Jack the Ripper." Four bodies have been found so far and there is, as yet, no viable suspect. The fifth body, however, turns out to be a model who has posed for Gustav Klimt. Suddenly, Klimt becomes the obvious suspect. He already has scandalized Vienna's society with his erotically charged modern paintings. When he is arrested, he calls on his lawyer, Karl Werthen. Werthen is a specialist in civil law, but has a proclivity towards criminal law. He also has a friend, Dr. Hans Gross, the renowned father of criminology. Gross agrees to assist Werthen to free Klimt and, in addition, to help track down the real killer. There are lots of possible paths to pursue. Because the method used to kill all the victims appears to be a ritualistic killing – all of their blood has been drained and their noses surgically sliced free of their faces – they first explore the Jewish community for a potential perpetrator. They realize soon enough, though, that they are more likely looking for an anti-Semite who is trying to cast blame on the Jews. Then again, the killer might very well be an artist who is intensely jealous of Klimt and his success. Or – the killings could be politically motivated. In fact, anyone in the city could be the likely killer. While the two "detectives" bobble about, with Gross playing the role of Holmes and Werthen playing his Watson, we get a detailed history of every building they pass – as if we were on a tour bus. We are also introduced to a variety of luminaries as they pass through the story since they happen to be in Vienna at the time. Names such as Kraft-Ebbing, Freud, Klimt, and Gustave Mahler are scattered throughout – mostly to show that the author knows his stuff. Unfortunately, if I wanted to read about the daily life in Vienna in 1898, I would have chosen a different book to read. In a mystery I expect – at the very least – a good plot and convincing characters. This novel offers neither.

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## **Zach says**

The Empty Mirror is a great book in the historical fiction mystery genre. Combining both real people with fictional ones, and historic events with made-up ones, J. Sydney Jones takes you back to turn of the (20th) century Vienna in a memorable way.

The main protagonist is Karl Werthen, a fictional lawyer, who together with the real life criminologist Hans Gross, investigates a series of murders in 1898 Vienna. Jones clearly did his research, as the book is teeming with details about life in the Hapsburg capital, including food, culture, dress, and history. Yet the plot itself is quite propulsive too, with a few typical twists as well as more surprising ones.

The one downside is that the events of the book retroactively change some key events in 19th century Austrian history. Without going into specifics, real-life events are given new fictional explanations which while semi-plausible are nonetheless a bit distracting. Furthermore, Jones does not have an author's note at the end of the book explaining what is and isn't true. I know this isn't required of historical fiction authors. But personally I always appreciate it.

Regardless, I really enjoyed this book, and am looking forward to reading the others in the series.

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## **Karen Baadsgaard says**

BAD- DIDN'T READ

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## **Terri Lynn says**

I absolutely love this book and this author. What a fine classy grown up mystery this is! Set in Vienna, Austria (a place I love) in 1898, lawyer (Advokat) Karl Werthen finds himself embroiled in what was termed the search for Vienna's version of Jack the Ripper when he defends artist friend Gustav Klimt who is accused of all of the murders when his model is the 5th victim. Werthen is ably assisted by criminologist Dr. Hans Gross and when they prove Klimt is innocent (another victim dies while he is in jail), they find they can't stop until they find out who the real killer. Moving among the upper echelons of aristocratic society, they soon become stalked by those who are behind the killings and there are even more killings. While they search Europe for answers, Werthen unexpectedly falls in love with the good friend of a woman his wealthy parents pushed at him and then something terrible happens- his beloved fiancée Berthe is kidnapped by this bloodthirsty man and his hired killer and he must do all he can to save her and to bring justice for those who have been killed.

This is one of those writers who can create a fascinating mystery with style and maturity, as I said, a very classy book.

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## **Barbara says**

The setting was well done. The author clearly knows a lot about Vienna and that time period. However, I

found the plot far fetched.

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### **Gerti says**

Ein Buch, das ich mit wachsendem Vergnügen und Interesse gelesen habe.

Das Thema, der Mord an Kaiserin Elisabeth von Österreich und der fragwürdige Selbstmord ihres Sohnes werden hier Sherlock Holmes like akribisch und intelligent verfolgt.

Im Prater werden über Monate Menschen ermordet abgelegt. Leider, oder muss ich sagen, glücklicherweise wird der bekannte Wiener Künstler Gustav Klimt verdächtigt und verhaftet. Dieser beauftragt seinen Freund, den Advokat Werthen die Sache aufzuklären.

Zusammen mit seinem Kollegen Dr. Gross, einem Kriminologen macht er sich ans Werk.

Ein außergewöhnlich gut angelegter, bis zur letzten Seite überraschender Krimi.

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### **Charlene says**

Really enjoyed this -- read it with a map by my side (wish one had been printed on the end pages!). I picked it up because of the Vienna setting & famous characters (painter Gustav Klimt, Freud, Empress Sisi, etc.). Author has lived in Vienna for 20+ years and obviously knows a lot about the city, its history, food, and its problems.

The 2 crime solvers are a criminology professor (the first one ever, he mutters that Arthur Conan Doyle steals his ideas) and a young lawyer. Maybe the mystery itself fell apart a bit, got rather unbelievable at the end but still enjoyed it and will look for more in this series.

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### **Thelma Adams says**

Sydney Jones' period mystery takes its cues from the Sherlock Holmes playbook -- creating a central team of two oddfellows, a criminologist and a lawyer. Since this is a first in the series, it takes a little while for the central characters to smooth their edges but when the book gets rolling, its clear that this is a fine pair to navigate this and future mysteries. I love the setting and all the pauses for food! Also, the appearance of the artist Klimt and his milieu. I got this novel as a Christmas present and I plan to read more in the series.

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### **Rosario (<http://rosario.blogspot.com/>) says**

I recently had a long weekend in Vienna before a work conference, so I thought I'd read something set there beforehand. This book, a historical mystery written by an author who's also written guidebooks of the city, seemed to me the perfect choice. The reviews were mediocre, but the main criticism was that there was way too much about city and not enough about the mystery. Given what I was after, that didn't seem like a problem.

It's 1898 and a serial killer is spreading fear in Vienna. The latest victim is an artist's model, and a well-

known painter she often posed for is identified as a suspect by the police. Our central character, lawyer Karl Werthen, gets involved when the painter comes to him for help, being a former client. With the help of a criminologist friend, he decides to investigate.

The Empty Mirror is one of those historical mysteries that uses real people as important characters. Our central character, lawyer Karl Werthen, is made up, but many of the people around him are not. The painter is Gustav Klimt, while the criminologist is also a famous one, Hanns Gross. Several other famous people make an appearance. Even Luigi Lucheni, the man who assassinated Empress Sissi, is given a speaking part. This is a concept I'm not wholly comfortable with, but ok, I could just read them as made up as well.

Unfortunately, even ignoring that issue, in the end, I just had to give up. I pushed myself and read almost two thirds of the book, but it felt like a chore, and by the time my trip had passed without me having managed to finish the book, there was no reason to continue. The biggest problem is the writing. The dialogue is extremely wooden and the plotting is just bad. These combine when Gross and Werthen are interrogating people. People speak in ways that just made me laugh, and they reveal things in ways that make no sense, unless it's to move the plot in particular ways.

I was also annoyed at how the book changed from what I thought it was (a relatively straight-forward hunt for a serial killer), to a story of grand conspiracies. The latter is really, really not my thing.

MY GRADE: So, a DNF.

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## **Janebooks says**

Murders and Mayhem in Historic Vienna....., March 9, 2010

Welcome to the Vienna of 1898. It's summer and Gustav Klimt, the handsome, notorious artist who adds elegant gold or colored touches to his paintings, is in eminent danger of being arrested. The fifth victim of a vicious murderer has been found on the grounds of the Prater amusement park built to celebrate Franz Joseph's fiftieth jubilee as emperor. Since June, disfigured bodies drained of blood with broken necks and severed noses have been dumped near the giant Ferris wheel in Vienna's Second District, one body every fifteen days.

Enter Advokat Karl Werthen, one of the few fictional characters in the book. Werthen has been hired to represent Klimt: it seems the recent victim is Klimt's favorite model. Werthen enlists the help of the famed Dr. Hans Gross, renowned father of criminology. After the sixth victim is found, Werthen and Gross through sound detecting discover the murderer much to the relief of the Austrian police. The reader is halfway through the novel.

In September of 1898, the Empress of Austria, Elisabeth is assassinated in Geneva. It has been nine years since the Mayerling tragedy when her son Rudolf, heir to the throne, is found dead with his mistress Marie Vetsera.

During their investigation of the sixth Prater murder, Werthen and Gross belatedly discover that the victim was Rudolf's personal valet at Mayerling. The Empress Elisabeth visited him before she left for Geneva. The royal connection adds another layer to their investigation: the case is reopened.

One of the delights of this novel is the introduction to prominent figures and the visits to renown places of

this fin-de-siecle metropolis of Vienna. We visit Krafft-Ebing, the eminent sexologist and psychiatrist, who ponders the victims' mutilations, particularly the severed noses. We visit Gustav Mahler, the conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic at the magnificent Musikverein, the Austrian actor Alexander Girardi on the stage of the Burgtheater, and view Brueghel's painting "Children's Games" at the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

You'll enjoy sitting in Werthen's study in a Biedermeier chair facing a lit fireplace after your tour of Vienna. Syd Jones, the author, takes little license with the history of the Viennese Ringstrasse period. And follows this intriguing mystery with a second Werthen/Gross novel entitled REQUIEM IN VIENNA.

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## **Kelsey says**

This book wears two faces. It's both a detailed exploration of turn-of-the century Vienna and a complex mystery stretching from palaces to slums. Although at times encyclopedic, *The Empty Mirror* does a great job balancing history and intrigue.

I read this book for two reasons. First, I recently went to Vienna and was stunned by the Sisi Museum. Sisi is the affectionate nickname of Empress Elisabeth, and she and her many siblings led fascinating lives, from innocent beauty to dark recluse, from assassination to electroshock therapy. It made me want to write a historical novel about her family. Since I didn't have time to write a book, research 1900's Vienna, and learn German, I read *The Empty Mirror* instead.

The second reason was that this was the first book agented by literary extraordinaire Alexandra Machinist (so I've read). But that may not be persuasive for the average reader...

*The Empty Mirror* does the best possible job of being two very different books. The mystery has many layers and had me guessing the whole time. The book is broken into several sections, and if the ending of section 1 doesn't turn you on your head, you'll enjoy how it all turns out. The final revelation is a little weak, but I enjoyed following the clues. The history side is also very strong. The reader learns about Viennese geography, from street names to attractions; "modern" thinkers, like Ernest Hemingway and Sigmund Freud; and any food an Austrian could wish for. The research is phenomenal. I was excited to learn so much about the captivating city. However, in order to explain this rich history, the characters would sometimes wax on about the hidden meaning of *AEIOU* (a call to Austrian supremacy) or coincidentally encounter various celebrities. Each exposition would only be a paragraph or two, but they added up over time.

I can't imagine a book doing a better job of making history and mystery perfectly equal. That said, this would have been a better book if it had been unequal. Either history or mystery should have taken center stage, and the other should have played a supporting role.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn about Vienna and prefers fiction over nonfiction. If you like mysteries but don't care that much about Austria, this may not be the book for you.

Although if you visit Austria, I'm sure you'll fall in love.

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