The Demon Lover Study Guide

The Demon Lover by Elizabeth Bowen

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Demon Lover and Other Stories by Elizabeth Bowen was first published in Britain in 1945. In 1946, the collection was published in the United States under the title *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories.* Without exception, reviewers greeted it enthusiastically, praising it for what was described in the *New Yorker* as "a completely successful explanation of what war did to the mind and spirit of the English people." Today, "The Demon Lover" is probably the most anthologized of Bowen's short stories, and critics claim that it reflects some of Bowen's greatest strengths as a writer.

Bowen was inspired to write "The Demon Lover" during World War II, after having experienced the Blitz, or aerial bombardment, of London by the Germans during 1940-41. Remembering the effects of World War I, people in London were overwhelmed by the events of World War II. Bowen's story, then, attempted to encapsulate the "war on top of war" sentiment which prevailed in post-Blitz London.

In "The Demon Lover" the main character, Mrs. Drover, confuses World War II with World War I. Returning home to collect some personal belongings during the aftermath of a recent bombing, she thinks of her long-dead fiance to the point where the reader does not know if this is a ghost story or simply a story of one character's neurotic mental state.

Author Biography

Elizabeth Dorothea Cole Bowen was born in Dublin, Ireland, on June 7, 1899. The daughter of aristocratic, Anglo-Irish parents, Bowen divided time between the family's Dublin home and Bowen's Court, their estate in County Cork, Ireland, during her early childhood. This ended, however, when Bowen's father was hospitalized for mental illness, and she and her mother went to England to stay with relatives until he recovered. In 1912, just as she and her family were to be reunited, her mother was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly afterwards.

Bowen was sent to England to be raised in the care of her mother's extended family. She attended Downe House Boarding School in Kent, and then went on to the London Council School of Art from 1918 to 1919. While in London, she began to work seriously on her writing. In 1923 she married professor Alan Charles Cameron and published her first collection of short stories, *Encounters*. In 1926 she and her husband moved to Oxford, bringing Bowen into contact with a literary circle that included the scholars C. M. Bowra and Lord David Cecil. During the next three years, she published two more short story collections and two novels, establishing a rate of production she would maintain nearly all of her life. When Bowen and her husband moved back to London in 1935, she became acquainted with Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group. Bowen wrote the stories in her collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* between 1941 and 1944, during the height of the bombardment of London by the Germans in World War II. Critics have long held that her wartime experiences had a lasting impact on her work, which often focuses on the effects of war on the individual.

A prolific writer, Bowen published short story collections, novels, essays, memoirs, and scripts for the British Broadcasting Corporation. She received much recognition during her lifetime and was an honorary member of both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Irish Academy of Letters. She was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1948 and received a Doctor of Letters from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1949 and from Oxford in 1956. In 1965 she was made a Companion of Literature in the Royal Society of Literature, and she received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1970. Bowen died of lung cancer in London on February 22, 1973.

Plot Summary

Mrs. Kathleen Drover has returned to London from her house in the country in order to pick up some things from the house that she and her husband abandoned because of the bombing of London by the Germans during 1940-41. It is a humid day in late August when she goes back to her mostly deserted street.

When she enters the house, she sees all of the telltale stains and dust left when she and her family moved out. The house has some cracks in it because of the bombing, and she wants to check on it. As she is passing her hall table, she notices a letter addressed to her—a strange sight, considering that the caretaker did not know of her return and that her house is boarded up and all of her mail has been forwarded to the country address. But she picks up the letter and takes it upstairs to her bedroom to read it, just moments before rain begins to fall.

The letter's author promises her that nothing has changed except for the time that has passed. He tells her that it is their anniversary and mentions a time for their meeting, of which she has no memory. Strangest of all, the letter is signed "K," her own initial. When she checks the date on the letter and finds that it is for that day, she suddenly feels strangely apprehensive. She looks at herself in the mirror, noting how thin she has become from food rationing, and we are told that, despite a facial twitch and a worried mood, she always looks calm.

As the clock strikes six, she thinks back to twenty-five years earlier, in 1916, when her young soldier-lover said goodbye for the last time. She remembers his promise to be with her and the way he cruelly pressed her hand against his uniform breast buttons. She remembers the relief she felt when she could run in and tell her mother and sister that he was gone, the isolation she felt because of his promise, and, following his supposed death in World War I, the long years before anyone was again interested in her. She has the sense of being watched, a feeling that is reinforced when the letter-writer suggests that he saw her leaving London.

Mrs. Drover is becoming increasingly nervous. The house sounds hollow, and she wonders how the letter got in. The more she thinks about it, the more fearful she becomes. As she gets up and locks her bedroom door, she thinks about how she needs to get away from the house and this impending meeting. She decides to collect the things that she wants to take with her and to call a taxi, forgetting that the phone service has been disconnected.

She thinks about her soldier-lover again, remembering everything but his appearance, and realizes that she will not recognize him. She then unlocks her door and listens at the top of the stairs. She feels a draft, as if someone has left the basement through a door or a window.

The rain has finally stopped. She decides to carefully leave her house and rush to the local taxi stand. She hurries because she does not want to hear the clock strike seven,

in case that is the hour for the mysterious meeting. The story ends when she arrives at the taxi stand and she notices that the taxi seems to be waiting for her. After entering the taxi, Mrs. Drover knocks on the glass behind the driver to get his attention. When their eyes meet, she screams and the driver speeds off, "accelerating without mercy." This conclusion has been the focus of much speculation—some critics argue that the driver of the taxi is Mrs. Drover's long-lost lover, while others claim that the episode of anxiety she experiences is due to the stress of the war.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

On a dreary, drizzly afternoon, Mrs. Drover returns to her London Home. She has come to gather some belongings that her family has left behind when they moved out to country to escape the bombs of World War II. At the moment there is no rain, but clouds are building up and another rain storm is on its way. Mrs. Drover has the feeling that somebody is watching her, although there is nobody around except a cat rubbing its back against the railings. She unlocks the warped door and pushes into the musty hall. The hall is dark, so she opens up a big window in the living room. As she looks about her, Mrs. Drover contemplates the life she previously lived in her Kensington home. The remaining furniture is all covered, and the piano has been removed. Everything is slightly dusty and smelling of the cold chimney. She puts down her parcels and heads upstairs to her bedroom.

She notices some new cracks from the bombing, but otherwise, it appears the caretaker is doing his job. As she looks around her eyes fall on a letter on top of the hall table. She is puzzled over its appearance. The caretaker knows that she is not expected in town today; so it is unlikely he would have left the letter lying on the table. All of her friends and acquaintances know that she lives the country, and the post office has directions to send all her mail to the country house. If the letter had been dropped in the mail slot, it would still be there and not on the hall table. Extremely puzzled, Mrs. Drover chalks up the letter's appearance to the carelessness of the caretaker. Now Mrs. Drover turns her attention to the contents of the letter. It is a short note, and the words shock her. The writer reminds her that they are to meet at their appointed time that day. Mrs. Drover notices that the date of the letter is the current one. Feeling herself go white, Mrs. Drover stares in the mirror, perhaps to verify that she is truly herself. The mirror reveals a 44-year-old woman, one who has lived a full life, but that is now faced with a ghost from her past.

As the rain begins crashing down, she's in a state of confusion over the letter's threat. It's been 25 years. How could she possibly remember what time was appointed for a meeting. The clock strikes six and Mrs. Drover determines that she needs to leave the house before the next hour chimes. Suddenly Mrs. Drover is the 19-year-old, Kathleen back in her parents' garden, a young girl saying goodbye to her soldier fiancé. She doesn't remember much about the soldier; she cannot even really remember his face. However, what she does remember is that he was not gentle or kind. While they stood out in that garden saying goodbye to each other, the soldier pressed her hand to his uniform very tightly, a button cutting into her hand, leaving behind a welt. She pledged to wait for him to return from the war, and there must have been a meeting planned. She tells him that he's going such a long way off, and he replies, "Not so far as you think." He continues by saying he will always be with her. She need do nothing but wait for his return. She remembers feeling very lost and wishing she had not made such a promise.

When a few months later her fiancé was reported missing, Kathleen was not as upset as she thought she would be at hearing of his presumed death. Her parents were relieved as well, never having felt comfortable with the young man who was to marry their daughter. They thought that in the few years, she would get over her loss and turn to new loves. However things did not work out that way. There did not seem to be many men interested in Kathleen. She had no suitors, no lovers, and no offers of marriage. When she was in her early thirties, and fearful of remaining a spinster, William Drover began courting her. They married, moved to Kensington Gardens, and began their family. They lived pleasantly, if a little dully, until bombs forced them to relocate to the English countryside.

As it continues to storm, Mrs. Drover puzzles over the appearance of the letter. Her own room, emptied of possessions and showing the effects of a long war, offers her no comfort. How did the letter come to be in the house? If the caretaker did not bring the letter inside, how did it get on the table? Mrs. Drover does not want to dwell on the supernatural implications of the letter's appearance. She considers the ways her home could be entered without a key. Maybe the deliverer of the letter is still there. Maybe she is not alone. What was the hour of their meeting to be? It could not be six o'clock as that hour has already chimed. Her first instincts are just to run away from the house. However, her family is depending on her to bring home certain items from London. She moves about tying parcels with fumbling fingers, the clock drawing nearer to the next hour. Mrs. Drover makes up her mind to call a taxi. The thought of a taxi driver, moving through the house with her to retrieve parcels, puts her at ease. She remembers that the phones have been disconnected, so she prepares to leave the house in search of a taxi. They will return, retrieve the packages, and head back to her family in the country.

Continuing to pack, Mrs. Drover's mind returns once more to August of 1916. The intervening 25 years disappear, and she is again that young girl, remembering everything with the clarity of glass. She remembers totally submitting herself to her fiancé's will. She was not herself, as everyone told her. She remembers all the details of that week in the summer; however, she has no recollection of her fiancé's face. That thought scares her more than any of her others. If she cannot remember her old lover's face, how will she know him to escape from him?

Mrs. Drover stands at the top of the stairs, ready to descend, and imagines she feels a draft of air traveling up the stairs from a basement window or door that has been opened. Perhaps someone is leaving the house. She makes her way from her home to the busy square where ordinary life continues. There are people walking, pushing their babies in strollers, and riding their bicycles. She slows her footsteps and goes in search of a taxi. This evening, there is only one taxi at the taxi rank. It starts its engine as Mrs. Drover approaches. As she settles into the taxi, a clock strikes seven. The driver has turned around in the direction of Mrs. Drover's house before she realizes that she told him where to go. She knocks on the window that separates the front seat from the back. The driver, braking quickly, turns around and slides the panel open. The action flings Mrs. Drover forward so that her face is almost touching that of the driver's. It takes a few moments before Mrs. Drover is able to scream. Then she screams loudly, beating

against the windows of the taxi with her gloved hands as the driver heads off into the deserted streets.

Analysis

"The Demon Lover" is based on an old ballad plot that follows the story of a young woman who promises to wait on her lover's return from battle. She also promises to love him forever. The woman receives word that the man has died in the fighting. She eventually marries another, only to have her dead lover appear at the wedding. He has returned from the grave to carry her away where they can be united forever. It is a twist on the medieval theme of eternal love.

The story takes place after the bombs of World War II's London Blitz have destroyed many of the buildings in the city. "The Demon Lover" also shifts back to the time Kathleen Drover spent with her fiancé, a soldier going off to fight in World War I, in 1916. The atmosphere is one of gloom and melancholy. The war is over, and people are attempting to return to their pre-war lives. The house in Kensington Gardens, to which Mrs. Drover returns, is riddled with cracks. That the cracks concern her is part of Mrs. Drover's practical nature. She is responsible and everyone counts on her to sensibly get things done. She has come to the house to retrieve some possessions that have been left behind as the family fled the bombings.

The emptiness and overall gloominess of the house is echoed by the weather. It has been a stormy day, and the afternoon is intermittently dark under waves of rain clouds. The discovery of the letter, presumably from her former fiancé, strikes an eerie tone that is heightened by the dismal weather and wretched war-time state of Mrs. Drover's home. The pleasant memories of raising her family in Kensington Gardens is contrasted with the recollection of a past love during a frightening time in Mrs. Drover's life.

Part of the difficulty in reading "The Demon Lover," is the confusion of time. The narrative covers the period of the summer of 1916, the years raising a family in the house in Kensington, and the present. As Mrs. Drover struggles to comprehend the message in the letter, her mind slips effortlessly back and forth between these time periods. In the present, Mrs. Drover is occupied with retrieving belongings from her London home and preoccupied with the contents of the letter she has found, warning her of the impending meeting that she had agreed to. In the past the young Kathleen is in the summer garden promising to love her fiancé forever and to wait for him.

It was during the summer of 1916, that Kathleen became engaged to the young soldier. Twenty-five years later, Mrs. Drover reflects that the young man never loved her, but was, rather, set on her. He made her promise to wait for him, pressing her hand cruelly to his uniform buttons. Kathleen makes a "sinister" pledge to wait for his return, fearful of the "spectral glitter" of his eyes.

Along with the supernatural appearance of the letter, there are other indicators that the lover may be in fact, a demon, or a ghost. Mrs. Drover refers to the spectral glittering of

his eyes. She stresses the fact that she cannot remember what his face looked like, and had, in fact, never seen it clearly. On her approach to the house, the narrator says that "no human eye" watches Mrs. Drover's return. Though, Kathleen Drover describes her life in the country as being circumscribed, the letter writer indicates that he was sorry to see her leave London, indicating that at least he has been watching her movements. These instances, along with the gloomy weather and the decaying house, lend themselves to reading "The Demon Lover" as a ghost story.

Another approach to "The Demon Lover" is to view Mrs. Drover as a woman headed for an emotional or psychological breakdown. The house in Kensington Gardens has been badly damaged by bombings: she notices new cracks in the walls and is concerned about them, as if the house is an extension of her own mind. After she reads the letter, she quickly peers into the mirror at her face. She sees there a 44-year-old woman, somewhat thin, slightly disheveled, and with a nervous twitch around her mouth. The assumption in this reading of the story is that Mrs. Drover, alone in the war-torn city, and operating under a burden of guilt for not keeping her pledge to her lover, has imagined the letter. Not normally given to flights of fancy, Mrs. Drover tries to find a reasonable explanation for how the letter came to be on the hall table, and is unable to do so. She becomes increasingly agitated as the story progresses. Since the letter is signed only "K," the reader could assume that she either imagined the letter or sent it to herself.

Alternatively, perhaps the soldier has returned and is in the house waiting for Mrs. Drover. While she stands at the top of the staircase listening, Mrs. Drover feels a draft of air coming up from the basement: "down there a door window was be open by someone who chose this moment to leave the house." Perhaps she is not imagining things that all.

As Mrs. Drover is swept off in the taxi at the end of the story, the reader is left to decide for himself what the demon in the story's title refers to. Is it a ghost? Is it the return of a betrayed lover? Is Mrs. Drover suffering a psychological breakdown?

Characters

Mrs. Kathleen Drover

The story centers on the perceptions and actions of Mrs. Kathleen Drover. When she finds a letter addressed to her in her abandoned London home, she thinks back to her former nameless soldier-lover during World War I. She is keenly aware of her surroundings: the atmosphere, weather, and particularly, a sense of strangeness. The letter lying on the table compels her to imagine the various possibilities for how the letter got there in the first place.

Because of the overwhelming sense of the strangeness of her situation, Mrs. Drover rushes upstairs to check herself in the mirror: her "most normal expression was one of controlled worry, but of assent . . . [she] had . . . an intermittent muscular flicker to the left of her mouth, but . . . she could always sustain a manner that was at once energetic and calm." To her family Mrs. Drover is a picture of stability and dependability. The letter unnerves her, however, and she begins to pack things in a "rapid, fumbling-decisive way." Although it is unclear whether she is haunted by the vengeful ghost of her soldier-lover or is neurotic, she completely breaks down at the end of the story.

Soldier-Lover

Although we see the soldier-lover only through Kathleen Drover's memories, he is a significant character. He treats her thoughtlessly, pushing her hand painfully onto his uniform breast buttons when she reaches to touch him and making her a promise that "I shall be with you . . . sooner or later. You won't forget that. You need do nothing but wait." He is reported "missing, presumed killed" in action in World War I.

Themes

Doubt and Ambiguity

The theme of appearance and reality is central to "The Demon Lover." The dubiousness of the appearance of the letter puzzles Mrs. Drover. How did it get on the table? Who placed it there? Her house is obviously deserted and untouched, which makes the appearance of the letter even more enigmatic. To verify her own conception of reality, Mrs. Drover looks in the mirror, and she sees herself, looking familiar and reassuring.

Her mind races, however, back in time to her mysterious, nameless soldier-lover with whom she was in love as a young girl. This vision reinforces the sense of him as potentially the "demon lover" of the title. He is remembered not with warmth but for his sense of his power or control over her. Mrs. Drover's association of the letter with the soldier-lover makes the reality of the letter questionable, although it is a physical object. When she escapes into a taxi, she sees the face of the driver. She then starts to scream and pound the glass between them. What does she actually see? Bowen plays expertly with Mrs. Drover's and our sensibilities.

Identity

It appears that Mrs. Drover knows herself only through her family's perceptions. She appears to them as a strong, secure woman, but she has buried parts of herself deep in her own memory. She remembers, for example, her feelings toward her soldier-lover and the feelings of isolation that she experienced when she agreed to wait for him. She is suspicious of the fact, however, that the letter is signed with her own initial, "K." Throughout the story, she cannot remember her soldier-lover's features, and it is difficult to tell whether she recalls his appearance when she sees the taxi driver's face at the end of the story.

Revenge

The contents of the letter may suggest that the soldier-lover intends to fulfill his twenty-five-year-old promise to return and "be with" Mrs. Drover. Is he indeed the demonic lover who has come back to take her away to her death for not keeping her promise to wait for him? This and the fact that the driver accelerates "without mercy" may suggest his revenge.

Sex Roles

Throughout the story, Mrs. Drover is portrayed as submissive, adhering to the traditionally prescribed role of a woman. She reacts passively to her soldier-lover when he hurts her hand, and she molds herself to him when they see each other. She allows

William Drover to marry her because she is "relieved" that he has come to court her. She is also nervous and easily frightened by weather, the striking of the clock, and the atmosphere of the house.

Victim and Victimization

Mrs. Drover is an innocent victim of both World Wars. She loses her soldier-lover during the first and is forced to abandon her house and move to the country during the second. Her food is rationed and her house has been bombed. She is obsessed with the war and the prospect of safely returning to the countryside with her family. She also feels victimized by the memory of her soldier-lover, who exerts his power over her and makes her seem different to her family when he is there. Because of this, she believes that he may have written the letter.

War and Peace

It is wartime again in England, and the war has made some major changes to Mrs. Drover's life. She thinks back to the soldier she knew during World War I. Coincidentally, the letter mentions "the fact that nothing has changed." The soldier is above all a figure of war and is associated with death. He haunts Mrs. Drover's imagination. On the other hand, Bowen gives the reader a natural reason for the presence of the letter: the air has shifted as someone moved out of the basement. Is it the war itself, then, that makes Mrs. Drover scream as she is driven through the deserted streets? We do not know for sure, and Bowen deliberately leaves this open to the reader's interpretation.

Style

Point of View

The story is told in third-person omniscient narration, which gives the reader a godlike perspective, unrestricted by time or place, allowing the reader to look into the minds of the characters. The story focuses primarily on Mrs. Drover's perceptions. At times the narration switches to the first-person point of view, or the point of view of a certain character, and then reverts to third-person, to heighten the intensity of Mrs. Drover's feelings. This breaks the flow of the narrative and enables the reader to directly perceive her thoughts.

Setting

Setting is a particularly important aspect in "The Demon Lover." The story takes place in a house with "some cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing" that is situated on a deserted street and gives an eerie atmosphere to the story. This is intensified by descriptions of the humid day, Mrs. Drover's tension before the rain starts up again, and the mysterious draft from the basement. The striking of the clock intrudes into the story, highlighting the passage of time and the encounter that Mrs. Drover is apprehensively expecting.

The time and place of the story is also significant. It takes place during the Second World War, specifically during the German Blitz in London. Mrs. Drover also thinks back to the First World War and confounds the two.

Symbolism

The structurally unsound house serves as a symbol of Mrs. Drover's mental state. The constant bombardment has eroded the house's stability, just as the constant pressure of the war has worn on Mrs. Drover's psyche. She cannot escape the effects of war when she enters the house, and the letter, signed with her own initial, "K," becomes a symbol of her repressed consciousness of that war and triggers memories of her World War I soldier-lover. The soldier-lover, in turn, becomes a symbol for all war, an everyman with an unknown face, whose promise to be with her takes on a frightening significance in wartime London. She has to release some of her repressed memories, perhaps symbolized by the air which escapes from the basement of the house and her screams when she sees the face of the driver—a face she sees as the face of her demon lover. The reader can interpret this as a sign of her mental breakdown, her subjective interpretation of events, or as a symbol for the face of war.

Gothicism

As suggested by the title, the story plays with the theme of the demon lover, the figure in Gothic literature who comes back to take away his unfaithful lover who has broken her promise to wait for him. In the ballad, she goes with him happily, only to find that he is taking her to her death. Here the soldier makes the promise to be with Kathleen, but she cannot remember what he looks like. Mrs. Drover is haunted by her memories, and Bowen implies that the face of the taxi driver is the face of the demon lover sweeping her away to places unknown.

Historical Context

World War II and The Blitzkrieg

The short story collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945), published in America as *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories* (1946), was written between 1941 and 1944, when Bowen worked in London at the Ministry of Information during the day and as an air-raid warden at night. She lived in London during the most intense period of the German air assault during World War II. Bombs with warheads of almost one ton began falling on Lon-don on September 8, 1944, and later that year the V-2 (revenge weapon 2) bombs began to fall. More than one thousand of these landed in Britain, killing over 2,700 people and injuring 6,500.

The setting of "The Demon Lover" is the empty streets of London, whose inhabitants have fled the destruction of their homes.

"Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out. In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up: a cat wove itself in and out of railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Drover's return . . . the door . . . had warped . . . [and] Dead air came out to meet her as she went in."

The scene is ominous as she creeps up the darkened stairs and opens the bedroom door. Unlike others, however, her house has only a few cracks in it, and she can still open a window despite nighttime blackout conditions.

The reader is spared the noise of the V-2s, as she does not stay there at night, but the silence of the deserted streets is "so intense—one of those creeks of London silence exaggerated this summer by the damage of war." The general historical context of the war—of both wars—is crucial to an understanding of the story.

World War I

The figure of the soldier-lover from World War I is crucial to Mrs. Drover's state of mind. He appears vividly in her memory twenty-five years later, although she still cannot remember his face. He had been on leave from France when he promised that he would be with her "sooner or later," no matter what happened to him. She thinks that he is going away far away, but the battlefields in France were relatively close to England. She remembers how his sharp uniform breast buttons cut her hand and the way she looked at him as if he were already a ghost.

Douglas A. Hughes argues in "Cracks in the Psyche: Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover'," in the Fall 1993 issue of *Studies in Short Fiction,* that Mrs. Drover has a breakdown after her love is reported missing in action. "A pledge of binding love—not at all uncommon among young lovers—exchanged with her fiance before he returned to

the trenches became, after his death and her subsequent derangement, a 'sinister troth' and he himself became a cold, ominous figure in her imagination." Hughes argues that she never overcomes her trauma from this loss, though she is able to marry and live cautiously. The house and letter trigger the eruption of Mrs. Drover's repressed past and her memories of World War I into the present. As the letter-writer states, "nothing has changed." War seems to grow in scale, and Mrs. Drover cannot cope mentally. By compounding the psychological stress of two global conflicts within the span of a single generation, Bowen has placed an exceedingly heavy burden on the shoulders of her protagonist.

Critical Overview

Because of her keen awareness of detail, atmosphere, mood, and particularly her focus on the perspectives of female characters, Bowen was frequently compared by critics to such authors as Jane Austen, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and Katherine Mansfield. Since World War II, however, critical focus on Bowen's writings has steadily declined.

The hardships Mrs. Drover endures upon returning to her deserted house has led to much critical debate. Issues concerning Mrs. Drover's fragile mental state and repressed memories, the association of demon lover with war itself, and the fact that Bowen's work shares its title with a Gothic ballad have been sources of continual critical discussion.

According to the postscript of the 1946 American edition of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories,* Elizabeth Bowen wrote the title story of her collection between 1941 and 1944. In 1945 Henry Reed, a reviewer for *The New Statesman and Nation,* praised Bowen for the way she conveyed the atmosphere of war to the reader and for her "ability to concentrate the emotions of a scene, or a sequence of thoughts . . . into an unforgettable sentence or phrase with a beauty of expression. . . ." This praise was echoed by American reviewers when the collection was published in the United States the following year. Without exception American critics lauded Bowen's work.

One of the first American reviews of Bowen's collection appeared in the March 1, 1946, edition of *Kirkus Reviews.* The critic lauded Bowen's "very special talent: a subtlety, occasionally carried to an excess where substance is dissipated; an immaculacy which, within its self-imposed limits, reaches artistic perfection." Moreover, S. H. Hay, in the April 13, 1946, edition of the *Saturday Review of Literature,* commented on the way Bowen created "an atmosphere of terror and savagery which by its very underplaying is the more pervasive and compelling." John Farrelly, in the April 7, 1946, edition of the *New York Times Book Review,* echoed Reed's commendations, claiming that Bowen's stories conveyed the sentiments of people in wartime England: "What all these people share is a lack of something they want and aren't likely to get.... But every one of them discovers something of his own identity and fights against the threat of annihilation to preserve that personal existence.... The familiar patterns of experience have been broken, at least temporarily. Life has been revaluated, perhaps more intelligently."

James Stern, in the April 29, 1946, edition of the *New Republic,* discussed how Bowen insightfully conveyed to her readers "the dreams, fantasies and hallucinations produced in people by loss of sleep, loss of property, broken marriages, broken lives, endless days and nights of destruction" experienced by the English people during their time of crisis. Stern also conveyed their desire to preserve the past under the burden of the unbearable present, symbolized by "the Passage of Time and the Architecture of the House," which he identified as key themes in all of Bowen's works.

Lotus Snow, in her essay published in 1950 in the *Western Humanities Review* found Bowen's theme of "the uncertain 'I'" in both her short stories and novels. In a postscript

to the 1946 American edition, Bowen herself referred to the ghost in "The Demon Lover" as "questionable," one who "[fills] the vacuum for the uncertain 'I'." Snow also argued that in her short stories Bowen "writes of the world of feeling: her people find a sense of personal identity through the subjective experiences of love, hate, illusion." Moreover, Snow claimed that in her novels Bowen stresses the emotional and social background of people whose lives were disrupted during the war.

In recent years, "The Demon Lover" has been widely anthologized in short fiction collections and is considered Bowen's most famous short work. Surprisingly, it has not appeared in any ghost story collections. Since 1946 critical articles have focused mainly on the psychological aspects of "The Demon Lover." While the historical background of the two World Wars is always a factor in any discussion of the story, recent critics are also interested in Mrs. Drover's psychological response to the traumatic stress caused by those wars.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Gardiner-Scott is an Associate Professor at Mount Ida College. In the following essay, she examines and discusses various critical examinations of "The Demon Lover."

The title of Bowen's best-known story, "The Demon Lover," refers to a Gothic ballad whose plot "focuses on a young woman's promise to love her young man for ever and await his return from battle," according to Charles E. May. After her beloved fails to return from battle (the legend goes) she marries someone else—only to have the soldier-lover show up, often at the wedding in the guise of a skeletonized corpse, to claim her and carry her away to be united with him in death. "The Demon Lover" is a variation on this theme, being at once a ghost story and a story about a woman's precarious mental state in wartime.

A historical perspective related to warfare in the twentieth century is essential to understanding the story. We learn from hints in the story, such as "some cracks in the structure [of the house], left by the last bombing," that "The Demon Lover" takes place during the London Blitz, during World War II, while Kathleen Drover's memory of the soldier-lover extends back almost thirty years to 1916, the middle year of World War I. Understanding this is crucial, because for Kathleen the past and the present fuse into one horrid, timeless moment at the end of the story.

Through the narrator's words, Bowen links Kathleen's fateful promise of fidelity with the supernatural elements of the old ballad, noting that "she already felt that unnatural promise drive down between her and the rest of all human kind. No other way of having given herself could have made her feel so apart, lost and foresworn. She could not have plighted a more sinister troth." (Further, she twice refers to the pain of her soldier-lover's uniform button in the palm of her hand, fixing that detail in our minds as a symbol of that youthful relationship and the soldier's hard pressuring of her.) Indeed not; for years after the disappearance of her betrothed, Kathleen was not courted by any man, and she felt herself "watched" by unseen eyes. By contrast, after she married William Drover, "[h]er movements as Mrs. Drover were circumscribed, and she dismissed any idea that they were still watched." Still, even though she has settled down for what she expects to be an ordinary domestic life, she still feels uneasy as the result of that earlier promise.

By marrying someone else, Mrs. Drover has been unfaithful to her soldier-lover, even though he is "missing, presumed killed." Thus, in her own mind, she is susceptible to unresolved guilt when she remembers him. Her remembrance of him intensifies upon her finding and reading the mysterious letter in the damaged house. The letter's message unleashes her repressed memory of her lover's promise to be with her forever—and she is further haunted by the fact that she cannot even remember his face. As the reader recalls the faceless person seen leaving the house before Mrs. Drover arrived, the thought arises that perhaps this could be the ghostly lover preparing for his dramatic confrontation with Kathleen, having left her the letter. Further, the face of the taxi-driver, which makes her scream, may be the face she cannot remember, as James L. Green and George O'Brien have argued. Certainly the fact that the cabbie drives Kathleen

away, "accelerating without mercy," ties him linguistically to the soldier-lover (a man "without very much kindness") as well as to the demon-lover who carries his faithless beloved away.

A related way of looking at the story, as argued by Green and O'Brien, is that both Kathleen Drover and England have been faithless to the values fought for during World War I, and therefore the menace of war goes on, with all its attendant threat of unexpected danger by forces beyond one's control, symbolized by the figure of the soldier, nameless and faceless. That she imagines him as a ghostly figure with "spectral glitters in the place of his eyes" keeping her from a place of safety adds to this level of meaning. She craved safety when she married William Drover, and that very sense of safety is threatened by the environment in which she finds herself when she returns to bomb-damaged London for the day.

The gloomy atmosphere of the story contributes greatly to whichever interpretation we choose to embrace. All of Bowen's critics stress the significance of the wartime setting—the damaged house and deserted street—and the lowering weather, with the sudden rainstorm in the middle of the story and the silence afterwards where nothing (and everything) has changed. In such a setting, the sound of the clock striking becomes heightened and ominous to Mrs. Drover.

Inside the house, Kathleen is once again in her old married setting, feeling isolated, lonely, and apprehensive. Her vulnerability is made clear in the passage in which the narrator notes, "The desuetude of her former bedroom, her married London home's whole air of being a cracked cup from which memory, with its reassuring power, had either evaporated or leaked away, made a crisis." Kathleen is completely caught in the existential moment, feeling alone as she has not felt in years; and the letter, whether written by the lover or existing only in her own subconscious, affects her deeply.

The letter is particularly significant in its wording—"The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely on you to keep your promise." For Kathleen, World War I has begun again; in that sense, nothing has changed between her lover and herself. The writer of the letter also implies that he has been watching Mrs. Drover's movements, as he knows she has left her London home. Mrs. Drover's situation is made clearer at this point: Either her ghostly lover is sadistic and playing games with her or the message in the letter exists only in her own mind.

Kathleen herself doubts the reality of the letter, though she is frightened by the fact that it got into the house, and wonders who put it there. She has the sense of an inexorable fate waiting to confront her. To convey this intensity of feeling, Bowen adjusts the narrative voice, switching abruptly from a third-person omniscient narrator into Kathleen's own voice, first-person narration. For example, Bowen writes that "at the thought of the taxi her heart went up and her normal breathing resumed. I will ring up the taxi now; the taxi cannot come too soon: I shall hear the taxi out there running its engine, till I walk calmly down to it through the hall. I'll ring up—But no: the telephone is cut off.... She tugged at a knot she had tied wrong." This transition into stream-of-consciousness narration makes us aware of Mrs. Drover's attempt at calm and just how

fragile her mental state is. She is hanging on grimly to her sanity, trying not to let herself be spooked by what she encounters.

The issue of Mrs. Drover's perceptions arises again when, for the second time in the story, she thinks back to the condition of her mental state twenty-five years earlier, when she was pressured to make her "unnatural promise" to the soldier. Again, Bowen shifts her narrator into first-person:

She remembered not only all that he said and did but the complete suspension of *her* existence during that August week. I was not myself—they all told me so at the time. She remembered—but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *under no conditions* could she remember his face.

So, wherever he may be waiting, I shall not know him. You have no time to run from a face you do not expect.

The narrative here is even more choppy than in other, earlier instances of stream-of-consciousness. In addition, the first transition from third- to first-person narrative is signalled by quotation marks; in the next two instances there are no signs for us. This shift in narrative technique is made to illustrate Kathleen's increasing mental fragility and agitation.

The critic Douglas A. Hughes has argued for a close identification between Kathleen's mental state and the damaged house, claiming that Kathleen, completely isolated from familiar landmarks and people, is ready for a mental collapse. According to this reading, she imagines the letter, the idea of it issuing from the repressed part of her psyche. Consumed with guilt at the memory of her betrayal of her soldier-lover, she thinks that the taxi-driver is her old lover and goes completely insane at the story's end, overwhelmed by the effects of war—old and new. To Kathleen, there is no end to the landscape of war, and past and present fuse in her mind. At the story's end, we do not know where she is being taken, but she definitely is in the grip of a force stronger than she, bringing us back again to the story's title and the theme of the demon lover.

What, then, is the demon that haunts her? Is it, as Hughes suggests, the demon of her repressed memories? Or is it, as Calder suggests, the war itself? War brings with it not only death but a sense of powerlessness to those caught up in it, a feeling of the loss of control over their lives. Perhaps, as various critics have hinted, the story does simply address fictively and delicately one woman's reaction to living with war.

Source: Tanya Gardiner-Scott, "An Overview of 'The Demon Lover'," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Calder debates the claims that Mrs. Drover of Bowen's "The Demon Lover" is either insane or unhappy in her marriage and instead examines the story as an allegory of life in England during the two World Wars. He also suggests that the setting of the story is a catalyst to Mrs. Drover's breakdown.

Of all of Elizabeth Bowen's short stories, none has been anthologized as often as "The Demon Lover." First published in *The Listener* in November, 1941, and reprinted in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945) and *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories* (1946), it is usually introduced as a clever tale of occult possession. Early critical commentary is typified by Allen E. Austin's remark that "'The Demon Lover' is a ghost story that builds up and then culminates like an Alfred Hitchcock movie."

This interpretation was first challenged by Douglas A. Hughes in his 1973 note "Cracks in the Psyche: Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover'" [*Studies in Short Fiction* 10, 1973]. "Far from being a supernatural story," he argued, "'The Demon Lover' is a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war." The ghostly threat, rather than having any external reality, is a product of the disturbed mental state of the protagonist, Mrs. Kathleen Drover. Her guilt over her fiance's disappearance and presumed death in the First World War, buried by years of conventional marriage, has been reawakened by another war, and she hallucinates his vengeful return. The inconstant woman in the English ballad "The Demon Lover" discovers that the lover is in fact the devil; in Bowen's story, "war, not the vengeful lover, is the demon that overwhelms this rueful woman" because it strips her of her recent memories and plunges her back to her betraying past.

In 1980, in an article entitled "Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover': Psychosis or Seduction?," [*Studies in Short Fiction* 17, 1980] Daniel V. Fraustino disputed Hughes's interpretation, arguing that it interpolates several key points in the text. There is no evidence, says Fraustino, that Mrs. Drover suffered an emotional collapse after the loss of her fiance or was gripped by "psychotic guilt," and nothing in her thought processes indicate incipient mania. To the contrary, the fiance was clearly a psychopath who survived the war and has now returned to kill Mrs. Drover on the twenty-fifth anniversary of their parting. Impelled by an unconscious desire to escape from an impoverished and unfulfilling marriage, she becomes the victim in a "murder mystery of high drama."

Fraustino's analysis rightly identifies some serious flaws in Hughes's reading—there is indeed little evidence that Mrs. Drover suffered an emotional collapse after the loss of her fiance—but in making his own case he is guilty, if not of interpolation, certainly of exaggeration. To counter Hughes's argument that Mrs. Drover's disarrayed house, which Bowen describes in characteristic detail, reflects her internal collapse, Fraustino claims that she has had an unsatisfactory marriage, marked by years of "accumulated emptiness." Her London house is an objective correlative, not of Mrs. Drover's psychological state, but of her "impoverished married life."

There is nothing in "The Demon Lover," however, to indicate that Mrs. Drover is dissatisfied with her marriage. After some years without being courted, she married William Drover at the age of 32, settled down in a "quiet, arboreal part of Kensington," and began to raise three children. When the bombs drove the family out of London, they settled in the country, and on the day of the story, wearing the pearls her husband had given her on their wedding, she has returned to the city to retrieve some things from their house. Empty of any human presence, it now seems to her full of "dead air" and "traces of her long former habit of life": a smoke stain up the fireplace, a watermark left by a vase on an escritoire, and scratch marks left on the floor by a piano. These may be images of emptiness, repetition, and stagnation, but they underline the absence of the family and its normal human interaction, not dissatisfaction with the marriage. She is a "prosaic" woman, whose "movements as Mrs. Drover [are] circumscribed," and her marriage is simply conventional.

Fraustino's view of Mrs. Drover as a discontented wife in an unfulfilling marriage runs into difficulty when he attempts to make her behavior relevant to the murder mystery plot. Like Hughes, he regards the title of "The Demon Lover" as an allusion to the English ballad about an absent lover, an intervening marriage, and a desertion from that marriage upon the lover's return. Bowen's story, however, has no indication whatsoever that Mrs. Drover intends or attempts, even fleetingly, to abandon her marriage. As a result, Fraustino can voice only the vaguest, most guarded of suppositions: "is it not possible that Bowen at least suggests Mrs. Drover's desertion?"

Finally, to build his case for murder, Fraustino interprets the character of the fiance in a way surely not justified by the text. He rightly emphasizes that the young soldier was never tender and loving, that he was "without feeling," and that he extracted an "unnatural promise" from Kathleen. When, however, he notes that she left the encounter with a weal on her palm, which he had "pressed, without very much kindness and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform," Fraustino concludes that "the soldier is a sadist of the most deranged kind . . . a psychopath." Cold, unfeeling, and disconcerting the fiance certainly is, but can his behavior really be called sadistic, deranged, or psychopathic? If not, how credible is it that he would return to kill his lover of 25 years earlier?

As Fraustino admits, his reading of "The Demon Lover" as a realistic murder story invites several practically unanswerable questions: "how the taxi-driver knew that Mrs. Drover would be visiting her London house on that particular day, or how he managed to engineer events so cleverly that she would inevitably seek a taxi precisely on the hour of seven, can only be guessed." After suggesting that Mrs. Drover may have gone to London in an unconscious response to the twenty-fifth anniversary and arranged in advance for a taxi, he confesses that the story does not provide enough information "to reconstruct a completely rational, satisfying interpretation of events."

If, then, there is no completely "rational" interpretation—and both the Hughes and Fraustino readings are attempts at rational explanations—could the story be operating on another level? Given her other writing, Bowen is unlikely merely to have written a ghost story or a tale of murder, though she does elsewhere explore psychological

breakdown. In connection with this last point, however, it is important to "The Demon Lover" in the context of the period in which it was written and of the collection in which it was published. In writing of the wartime milieu in the preface to the American edition, Bowen states that the stories "may be found interesting as documents, even if they are negligible as art. This discontinuous writing, nominally 'inventive,' is the only diary I have kept" [*Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories,* 1946]. It is as a wartime "document," then, a "diary" entry of a woman's response to yet another war, that "The Demon Lover" perhaps can be most clearly understood....

If Bowen were writing only about the women haunted by the memories of lovers lost in the First World War, however, she is hardly likely to portray Mrs. Drover's fiance in such harsh, negative terms. After all, few women would mourn the loss of a painful presence or have their present settled lives dislocated by its return. The formula demands a loving fiance described in such detail as to evoke a sense of poignancy when he is lost. In Bowen's story, there is nothing sensitive or kind about the soldier, and, more remarkably, he is in no way individualized. We are given the barest of details, not about his features, but about his uniform, and his face remains hidden by the darkness. This lack of identity is emphasized again later when Bowen writes: "She remembered—but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *Under no conditions* could she remember his face" (original italics). Though this is obviously a very significant element in the story, both Hughes and Fraustino give it little attention. Hughes briefly suggests that the facelessness is the result of Mrs. Drover's faulty memory 25 years after the event, and Fraustino makes no mention of it.

Such an unusual treatment of the soldier suggests that he is meant to represent something quite different from the conventional lost lover, something perhaps arising from the conditions and times in which "The Demon Lover" was written. In 1935, sparked by Holtby's review, Bowen might well have described the unsettling recollection of lost love. Several years into the Second World War, when Britons were facing the real possibility of annihilation of their culture and civilization, she is more likely to have invested the soldier with a more ominous significance. In the midst of one war, a relic from an earlier one that was to have been the war to end all wars, would be a ghastly symbol of endless, inescapable violence.

In his forward to *Writers on World War II* [1991], Mordecai Richler calls the Second World War "no more than a second act," and it has become commonplace to refer to the inter-war period as "the Long Armistice." The realization that the years from 1919 to 1939 were merely a temporary respite from armed conflict, however, came early to many thinking Britons. The Yorkshire novelist Phyllis Bentley, for example, wrote of "the armistice period [1919-1939] in British fiction" in the *New York Times* in August of 1941. Bowen, born in 1899 and having worked in a hospital for shell-shocked soldiers in 1916, could hardly have escaped feeling that the violence of one war had been let loose again in another.

Looked at as allegory, much in "The Demon Lover" becomes explicable. The present action takes place in August 1941, and the earlier parting took place in August 1916, almost exactly half way through a war that began in August—just as August 1939 had

seen Europe rushing into another conflagration. The faceless, featureless soldier becomes a representative figure, a threatening everyman in military uniform. The absence of kindness, his not "meaning a person well," his being "set upon" Kathleen rather than in love with her, suggest that she is gripped by a force that is seductive but not benign. That she is in the presence of something demonic is conveyed by the "spectral glitters" she imagines "in the place of his eyes." The experience of war could hardly be more vividly embodied than in the image of the young woman's hand being so forcefully pressed onto the buttons of a military uniform that they leave a weal on her palm. Tennessee Williams employs a similar metaphor in *The Glass Menagerie* when he describes the American middle class "having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy" [*Twentieth Century Drama*, eds. Ruby Cohn and Bernard Dukore, 1966]. In Bowen's story, "the cut on the palm of her hand was, principally, what [Kathleen] was to carry away."

Kathleen takes something else away from her encounter with the soldier, though it becomes forgotten in her subsequent inter-war life: "the unnatural promise." Inexplicable in conventional terms, Bowen's language here becomes more understandable if it suggests complicity with war. In perhaps the last major war that the public approached with zealous idealism, in which women saw men off to battle amid banners and brass bands, and in which they gave white feathers to young men not in uniform, it would seem that they "could not have plighted a more sinister troth."

Just as war subsumes normal human life and interaction, Kathleen experienced a "complete suspension of her existence during that August week" when, she is told, she was not herself. In the years immediately following her loss, she suffered a "complete dislocation from everything," just as the western world went through a decade of dislocation□whether it was the Roaring Twenties in America or the era of Evelyn Waugh's Bright Young Things in Britain□in reaction to the disillusionment and horror of the First World War. And just as the 1930s brought the world back to a sober confrontation with serious issues of economics and politics, Kathleen's thirties made her again "natural enough" (as opposed to the "unnatural promise") to return to a conventional pattern of living. She married the prosaically named William Drover, and settled complacently down, convinced that they were not "still watched."

For many people in Britain, the 1930s was a period of similar complacency, grounded on the assumption that war had been "presumed killed" by the Treaty of Versailles and the creation of the League of Nations, and that appeasement would prevent its return. As we now know, however, the seeds of the second armed conflict had been sown and not eradicated in the first. Kathleen had thought that her khaki-clad demon was "going away such a long way," but his reply, "not so far as you think" suggests that war was never remote, no matter how normal and settled her life and that of her fellow citizens. The inevitability in his "I shall be with you, sooner or later.... You need do nothing but wait" matches the seeming inexorable march to September 1939 when, in the words of his letter, "in view of the fact that nothing has changed" the European powers had to return to their "sinister troth" with war.

But Kathleen is not haunted by her demon lover in September 1939. Total war did not really touch those in Britain until the following summer, and then she and her family were isolated from its full horror by living in the country. It is when she returns to London's deserted streets, cracked chimneys, and her shut-up, bomb-damaged house that she receives the letter. "The hollowness of the house this evening canceled years on years of voices, habits and steps," putting her back into the more dominant awareness of war, and so her demon soldier appears—on one level perhaps an hallucination but on another a symbol of war that will not go away.

In her 1916 parting from her fiance, Kathleen had suffered a "complete suspension of her existence" when she was "not herself"; and the final lines of the story return to this idea, but much more dramatically and terrifyingly. Several moments after the taxi moves off, she remembers that she has not "said where," in other words that she has given no instruction and that she no longer controls the direction of her life. Bowen treats the taxi, normally an island of security in London's streets, as a brutal machine in a brutally mechanized age; the jolt of the driver's braking throws Kathleen forward so violently that her head is nearly forced into the glass. This places her six inches from the driver's face, and as they stare "for an eternity eye to eye," she recognizes what she could not remember in the features of her fiance 25 years earlier: the face of war itself.

Like most allegorical readings, this interpretation of "The Demon Lover" will invite questions, and some of the suggested parallels may not persuade everyone. It should be remembered, though, that other tales in *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories* are fantastic and hallucinatory but above all about people's experience of war. In "Mysterious Kor" a young woman is preoccupied by a waking dream of escape to the mythical city of Kor, arguing that "if you can blow places out of existence, you can blow places into it." In "The Happy Autumn Fields," another young woman seems to lead a dual existence: one in London during the Blitz and one in the country at the turn of the century. Neither story is totally explicable in rational terms, but both dramatize what Bowen called "resistance to the annihilation that was threatening [them]—war."

"The Demon Lover" is another reaction to that threatened annihilation but also a reminder of its origins. Always conscious of the formative influence of the past, Bowen wrote a book about her family home, *Bowen's Court* [1964], in 1942, and in an afterword stated: "War is not an accident: it is an outcome. One cannot look back too far to ask, of what?" "The Demon Lover" links the Second World War to the First and concludes horrifically that our "sinister troth" with war is inescapable. The final image of Kathleen trapped in a taxi "accelerating without mercy" into the "hinterland of deserted streets" perfectly captures the feelings of millions of people who in 1941 seemed to be propelled at an increasingly frenzied pace into a European wasteland of rubble and death. Like Kathleen, they could only scream.

Source: Robert L. Calder, "'A More Sinister Troth': Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover' as Allegory," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 31, No. 1, Winter, 1994, pp. 91-7.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Fraustino disputes the argument that Mrs. Drover is insane, stating that the story is a murder mystery.

In a major article on Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover," Douglass A. Hughes dismisses the popular ghost-story interpretation and advances his own psychological one. The story, he says, is "a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war.... War, not a vengeful lover, is the demon that overwhelms this rueful woman" [*Studies in Short Fiction,* 10 (1973)]. To support his argument, Hughes maintains that "the narrator subtly but clearly indicates why the forty-four year-old woman suddenly loses her tenuous hold on reality . . . and succumbs to madness." His argument rests on three major premises: that as a young girl Mrs. Drover suffered a "severe nervous breakdown" from which she never fully recovered; that her visit to her war-ravaged home occasions a "threshold experience that activates her dormant hysteria"; and finally, that the contents of the letter, the man's leaving the basement, and the demon lover as taxi driver are all "examples of hallucination," figments of her weakening mind. Yet, however convincing on the surface, Hughes's argument rests not on his close reading of the text but on his interpolation of several key points; and a careful analysis of his argument not only discards his major points but also suggests an interpretation that avoids textual misrepresentation and presents this short, enigmatic story in its original intent: a well-wrought mystery of high suspense.

In examining Hughes's delusion-madness theory, we must first carefully consider the initial premise upon which he builds everything else: that the young Kathleen suffered a "severe nervous breakdown" subsequent to her fiance's assumed death—a trauma, Hughes claims, her married life "shored up against" and assuaged. For, he claims, her visit to her war-damaged house ushers her into the buried and forgotten past, disinterring old "feelings of loss and guilt" that lead to her final hysteria. But Hughes's theory clearly interpolates a text that says nothing to suggest Mrs. Drover's emotional collapse after the loss of her fiance. The narrator merely remarks that she suffered a "dislocation" (albeit "complete") and that her thirteen years of anxiety (the text warrants no stronger word here), which Hughes insinuates to be part of her "breakdown," came to pass as prospective lovers "failed to appear." Hughes correctly observes that at the time of the story Mrs. Drover bears a facial tick (the remnant, the narrator tells us, of a former "quite serious illness"), but he mistakenly attributes it to the loss of her fiance. The story clearly states that the illness attended "the birth of the third of her little boys." Hence, we must conclude that the married years between the loss of her fiance and the time of the story did not "shore up against" her original trauma (a trauma Hughes clearly exaggerates); rather, these years seem to have witnessed the causes of her present emotional difficulties.

Hughes correctly notes that the house is an "objective correlative of Mrs. Drover's psychological state," but he fails to consider that it may also symbolize her life with William Drover, a man she married out of desperation after other suitors failed to appear. Thus, the house does not signify a fundamentally disturbed mentality, ravaged

as it may be, issuing from a buried trauma; it reflects her impoverished married life. And this conclusion seems more fitting: the house in the story is the one she "settled down in" as a married woman, not the one she grew up in during the Great War. The landmarks and objects Mrs. Drover encounters upon entering her home are not, as Hughes declares, significant in triggering her "dormant hysteria" for her lost fiance; they are significant in presenting the "piled up" years of accumulated emptiness. Thus, images of age and death, of repetition and stagnation, proliferate in the description of the house. The street Mrs. Drover's house faces is an "unused channel," and her "long former . . . life" with her family, a "habit." The "yellow smoke-stain up the white marble mantelpiece," "the ring left by a vase on the top of the escritoire," "the bruise in the wallpaper where . . . the china handle had always hit the wall," "the claw-marks" left on the parquet by the piano—all suggest the repetitious character of Mrs. Drover's "prosaic" life.

Finally, in examining Hughes's delusion-madness thesis we must search the text for evidence that Bowen intended the contents of the letter and the man leaving the basement to be understood as delusions, evidence of Mrs. Drover's relaxed grip on reality—assumptions Hughes himself finds "diffi-cult to accept." Indeed, if presenting delusions is Bowen's aim, she goes about it strangely, for she seems to emphasize her protagonist's lucidity, as when Mrs. Drover first sees the letter addressed to her on the hall table:

. . . then the caretaker *must* be back. All the same, who, seeing the house shuttered, would have dropped a letter in at the box? It was not a circular, it was not a bill. And the post office redirected, to the address in the country, everything for her that came through the post. The caretaker (even if he were back) did not know she was due in London today—her call here had been planned to be a surprise—so his negligence in the manner of this letter, leaving it to wait in the dusk and the dust, annoyed her.

Clearly, nothing in Mrs. Drover's thought processes indicates an incipient mania; nor do we sense "psychotic guilt" (as does Hughes) in her attempts to objectify matters by polishing a clear patch in a mirror and looking "at once urgently and stealthily in." In fact, her attempts to "rally herself" by "shutting her eyes" and telling "herself that she had imagined the letter" render Hughes's theory even more unconvincing. Also, and importantly, the narrator characterizes Mrs. Drover as a woman whose "utter dependability was the keystone of her family life."

In the preface to *Ivy Gripped the Steps* Miss Bowen states that the stories in the volume contain "hallucinations"; she adds, however, that the "hallucinations in the stories are not a peril; nor are the stories studies of mental peril." She further states that the stories form an organic whole; they do not appear in the "time-order in which they were first written," but rather in a sequence that enhances their "cumulative and collective meaning." Therefore, the position "The Demon Lover" occupies in this volume should in some way reflect the story's meaning. For example, the story's appearance exactly midway in the volume seems to rule out any extravagant interpretation like Hughes's madness theory; and the low-keyed story that follows it, "Careless Talk," reinforces this reading approach. Also, if the volume contains a clue to the meaning of "The Demon

Lover," it probably lies in the story that immediately precedes: "Songs My Father Sang Me." Set in post-World War I England, the story describes a young soldier's disaffection with peacetime, with civilian life, and with his insensitive, security-conscious wife. The story ends with his desertion from her and his infant daughter. "The Demon Lover" does not exactly duplicate this theme of desertion, but it does suggest a motive for infidelity and perhaps an unconscious reason for Mrs. Drover's wanting to escape: an unfulfilling marriage that was a mistake from the start. Hughes is correct: Mrs. Drover is not consciously or "in reality . . . a faithless woman," but he ignores Mrs. Drover's deep and lingering dissatisfaction with her marriage and the "quite serious illness" after the birth of her third boy that may, like the soldier in "Songs My Father Sang Me," signify her growing unconscious need to escape. Bowen's selection of the title for her story may in this regard be illuminating: the theme of the English ballad of the same title is desertion—an inconstant woman's marriage in the absence of her lover, and her final desertion from her husband and children upon her lover's return, a lover now ostensibly wealthy but in fact the devil himself.

In view of Bowen's allusion and her concern with the theme of desertion in the story that precedes "The Demon Lover" is it not possible that Bowen at least suggests Mrs. Drover's unconscious desertion? Clearly, part of the answer lies in the identity of the taxi driver. Does Mrs. Drover hallucinate, as Hughes maintains, thereby mistaking the driver for her former fiance? If so, why amidst her violent screams and beating hands does he accelerate "without mercy"? Here Miss Bowen's choice of words is significant, for they echo the description of the fiance at the time he courted Kathleen. Described as "without feeling," the soldier appears incapable of love in a normal sense. "He was never kind to me," Mrs. Drover reminisces. "I don't remember him kind at all. Mother said he never considered me. He was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well." During her mysterious romance, Kathleen was never kissed but rather "drawn away from and looked at." And the "unnatural promise" isn't the only reminder she has of him, for she carries a "weal" on the palm which he "pressed, without very much kindness, and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform." Clearly, the soldier is a sadist of the most deranged kind. Not surprisingly then, he chooses to celebrate their anniversary, twenty-five years to the day, in the only way consistent with his destructive sense of love: with Mrs. Drover's homicide. As in the ballad, the fiance has returned (importantly he was only "presumed dead") to claim his lover-victim on their silver anniversary. In Bowen's story, however, he is a psychopath, not the devil. He left the note for her, and it's he Mrs. Drover hears leaving the basement.

This interpretation may not suggest the answer to every question the reader may have. How the taxi driver-lover knew that Mrs. Drover would be visiting her London house on that particular day, or how he managed to engineer events so cleverly that she would inevitably seek a taxi precisely on the hour of seven, can only be guessed. However, the story does not totally lack clues that rationally explain the events of that day—events that otherwise appear either totally unrelated (thus supporting Hughes's theory of Mrs. Drover's hysteria) or else supernaturally arranged. For instance, the text indicates that the taxi's arrival may have been prearranged, for Mrs. Drover states that she "will ring up the taxi now; the taxi cannot come *too soon"* (my emphasis). Also, her visit to London

on the day of her silver anniversary may be related to the "unnatural promise" she made, the exact nature of which the reader is not told. As a young girl Kath-leen may not have taken seriously or fully understood her "sinister troth," but in her unfulfilled, care-worn middle age she may have all too easily, though unconsciously, fulfilled it. We can only speculate on these possibilities, however; the story's brevity and lack of detail give little information on which to reconstruct a completely rational, satisfying interpretation of all events. Moreover, the story's thrilling suspense seems almost to depend on the reader's own sense of dislocation, on the interruption of logical cause and effect—which is why the ghost story interpretation will always remain a popular and viable one.

Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover," then, has greater similarity to the ballad of the same title than critics have so far noted. That a basic story outline is common to both works seems reasonable: an absent lover, an intervening marriage, and a desertion from that marriage upon the lover's return. Moreover, by accepting the story as literally presenting a kidnapping and probable homicide, we need make no unwarranted suppositions about a twenty-five-year-old nervous condition, about Mrs. Drover's "psychotic guilt," or about the hallucinations concerning the letter and the man's leaving the basement. Nor need we assume without the least bit of evidence a fluctuating narrative point of view—one moment an objective third person, the next the centered consciousness of an hysteric. When the narrator states that a "draught . . . emanated from the basement where a door or window was being opened by someone who chose this moment to leave the house," we have no reason whatsoever to assume hallucination. Finally, while the psychological interpretation has its own special kind of appeal, this view of the story as a murder mystery of high drama will attract those students who believe that the best reading interpolates the least.

Source: Daniel V. Fraustino, "Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover': Psychosis or Seduction?" in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 17, No. 4, Fall, 1980, pp. 483-87.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Hughes questions the common reading of "The Demon Lover" as a ghost story, arguing instead that it is a "pathetic psychological drama."

In a recent study of Elizabeth Bowen, Allan E. Austin has written, "'The Demon Lover' is a ghost story that builds up and then culminates like an Alfred Hitchcock movie" [*Elizabeth Bowen*, 1971]. This misreading of Miss Bowen's unforgettable story is, to judge from my experience with student interpretations, fairly common. Far from being a supernatural story, "The Demon Lover" is a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war. Because the narrative point of view is restricted to that of the patently disturbed protagonist, Mrs. Kathleen Drover, some readers may see, as the character herself certainly does, the ominous return of a ghostly lover. But in contrast to Mrs. Drover's irrational belief that she is watched and in peril, the narrator subtly but clearly indicates why the forty-four year-old woman suddenly loses her tenuous hold on reality at this particular moment and succumbs to madness.

In the English ballad "The Demon Lover," an inconstant woman betrays her absent lover and marries another man; but when the ostensibly wealthy lover returns years later, the woman is quick to abandon her husband and children. Too late, she discovers the lover is, in fact, the devil. Miss Bowen's story superficially resembles the ballad, and the author even relies upon the poem to suggest how Mrs. Drover views herself. In reality, however, Mrs. Drover is decidedly not a faithless woman and there is no spectral figure come from the nether world to claim her. Like all the characters in the collection of stories *Ivy Gripped the Steps* (published first in London as *The Demon Lover*), Mrs. Drover is simply an indirect casualty of war. In the First World War, at the age of nineteen, she lost her fiance, precipitating her first emotional collapse, which lasted for thirteen years. Twenty-five years later the air war in Britain has the devastating psychological effect of depriving Mrs. Drover of her recent past. War divests her of the memory of those years that separated her from the feelings of loss and guilt she experienced at the news of her fiance's disappearance. War, not a vengeful lover, is the demon that overwhelms this rueful woman.

Miss Bowen has said that the stories in *Ivy Gripped the Steps* form an organic whole, having grown out of the unnatural pressures experienced by the British during the last war. In the Preface to that book, she wrote, "Personal life here put up its own resistance to the annihilation that was threatening—war.... To survive, not only physically but spiritually, was essential. People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves . . . from the wreckage." Finally she says, "The search for indestructible landmarks in a destructible world led many down strange paths." The beauty of "The Demon Lover" lies in the skill with which the author, in the shortest possible space, reveals how Mrs. Kathleen Drover loses her way on the path leading from a crumbling present to a permanent but terrifying past.

From the first paragraph of the story the narrator begins to attenuate and ultimately to efface the significance of the landmarks and objects Mrs. Drover associates with her recent past. Returning to the bomb-damaged and shut-up Drover house in London by her familiar street, she is struck by the "unfamiliar queerness which had silted up." The whole neighborhood, which would have been animated with life in earlier years, stands silent and deserted. When Mrs. Drover pushes into the house "dead air came out to meet her as she went in," and she "was more perplexed than she knew" by the scene before her. Looking at the empty drawing room with its cold, dead hearth, she observes the traces of the life she and her family had left there: the smoke stain on the mantelpiece, the ring left by a vase on a table, the bruise left by a door handle on the wall, and the scratches left by a piano on the parquet. "Though not much dust had seeped in, each object wore a film of another kind; and, the only ventilation being the chimney, the whole drawing-room smelled of the cold hearth." The smell of ashes and the film covering the objects suggests the awareness of time, the presence of death. As anyone who has revisited a *deserted* former residence knows, the experience can be unsettling. For Mrs. Drover, psychologically maimed and predisposed to a sense of loss, the return to the house is a shattering revelation, a threshold experience that activates her dormant hysteria. In fact, Miss Bowen explicitly utilizes the war-damaged house as an objective correlative of Mrs. Drover's psychological state on this August evening. Early in the story we read, "There were some cracks in the structure [of the house], left by the last bombing, on which she was anxious to keep an eye." Later the narrator says, "The desuetude of her former bedroom, her married London home's whole air of being a cracked cup from which memory, with its reassuring power, had either evaporated or leaked away, made a crisis.... The hollowness of the house this evening cancelled years on years of voices, habits, and steps." Thus, with the cancellation of these years, which had been shored up against the trauma of the past, Mrs. Drover is returned to that dreadful past and the threat she feels it holds for her.

This threat has no objective reality but is clearly a manifestation of Mrs. Drover's mental state. The narrator is careful to provide a brief psychological history of the protagonist to explain why she is so vulnerable to the ambiance and events within the story. After her fiance was reported missing and presumed killed in action, Kathleen Drover suffered a severe nervous breakdown, "a complete dislocation from everything." For nearly thirteen years she was removed from the normal connections of life and had no social relations with men. A pledge of binding love—not at all uncommon among young lovers—exchanged with her fiance before he returned to the trenches became, after his death and her subsequent derangement, a "sinister troth" and he himself became a cold, ominous figure in her diseased imagination. During this long period she felt spied upon and vaguely threatened, but after marrying William Drover her activities "were circumscribed, and she dismissed any idea that they were still watched." This is an obvious example of paranoia. Although she was apparently well enough to live an outwardly normal life, to be a wife and mother, Mrs. Drover never wholly recovered from her personal trauma of the Great War, for her "most normal expression was one of controlled worry." Not long before the events of the story, she has suffered "a quite serious illness" and is left with a facial tic, evidence of a nervous disorder. Thus the mental health of the Kathleen Drover the reader meets as the story opens is indeed fragile.

If this psychological interpretation of "The Demon Lover" has thus far been convincing, it should not be difficult to accept hallucination as an element in such a story dealing with paranoia. The author herself speaks in the Preface of hallucinations in the stories included in *Ivy Gripped the Steps* . The extraordinary letter, the man heard leaving the house by way of the basement, and finally the demon lover as taxi driver are all, I believe, examples of hallucination. Although she may find an envelope on the hall table and carry it to her former bedroom before opening it with some anxiety, the message Mrs. Drover reads is imagined, not unusual for someone suffering from psychotic guilt. On this August evening, the same month and time her fiance bade her farewell years before, conscious of "the pearls her husband had given her on their marriage," she reads a message based on the irrational guilt she feels for betraying her lover. Mrs. Drover even suspects she has imagined the message. "To rally herself, she said she was in a mood—and, for two or three seconds shutting her eyes, told herself that she had imagined the letter. But she opened them—there it lay on the bed." The paper on the bed may well exist but the message is a fabrication of her own mind.

In the climax of the story, Mrs. Drover believes her demon lover has found her and is spiriting her off in a taxi, but again she is pitifully deluded. When she slips into the taxi that "appeared already to be alertly waiting for her," the church clock strikes seven, reminding her of "the hour arranged." Even though she has earlier thought, "So, wherever he may be waiting I shall not know him," when the clock strikes she is immediately convinced her hour has come and she takes the unsuspecting taxi driver for a fiend. At this moment Mrs. Drover passes into madness, seeing herself swept away into deserted, war-ravaged streets.

I believe most readers of "The Demon Lover" want to view it as a ghost story, for there is an undeniable titillation in such supernatural fiction. Miss Bowen's story may be read as a ghost story if one is willing to accept the perspective of Mrs. Drover, who is obviously mentally disturbed. The author, however, provided ample evidence to suggest that the story is a pathetic psychological drama, as I have attempted to show.

Source: Douglas A. Hughes, "Cracks in the Psyche: Eliza-beth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover'," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 10, No. 4, Fall, 1973, pp. 411-13.

Adaptations

"The Demon Lover" was adapted for radio broadcast on August 27, 1946, and was read by Evelyn Russell.

"The Demon Lover" was also produced on January 10, 1974, from the original adaptation, for Radio 4, Bristol, England.

Topics for Further Study

Research conditions in London, England, during the Blitz of World War II, and compare what you find with the setting of "The Demon Lover."

Find a version of the English ballad, "The Demon Lover," and trace its use in the story. How do the two compare?

Compare "The Demon Lover" with Edith Wharton's "Pomegranate Seed." Discuss any similarities or differences you observe.

In what way is "The Demon Lover" a ghost story? Find some other English ghost stories and compare them.

Look at studies of people in wartime and post-traumatic stress syndrome. Can you find any connection with Mrs. Drover's state of mind?

Compare and Contrast

1920s: Spiritualism, the belief in the supernatural accompanied by attempts to contact spirits of the dead, becomes very popular after World War I. Many churches and societies feature some form of spiritualistic belief.

1990s: Closely aligned with New Age beliefs, spiritualism becomes popular again, particularly in the United States. Putting a new spin on spiritualism, many modern-day channelers are as apt to attempt to contact extraterrestrials or spirits from ancient mythic societies as they are to try to communicate with recently deceased relatives.

Early 1940s: The Battle of Britain, the air war fought between the Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe, rages over Great Britain. Bowen writes "The Demon Lover" after the German Blitzkrieg; her protagonist, Mrs. Drover, symbolizes the desperation that many feel.

1998: World War II remains a popular theme for stories. *Saving Private Ryan,* a realistic treatment of the D-Day invasion, is one of the year's most acclaimed films. Like Mrs. Dover in "The Demon Lover," Private Ryan must deal with the losses of war long after the fighting has stopped.

What Do I Read Next?

The Turn of the Screw, Henry James's 1898 short novel. When a governess goes to take care of two children, she believes she sees the ghosts of the previous governess and her master's valet.

W. W. Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw" (1902). This short story is about a magical monkey's paw that will give bereaved parents three wishes. They wish that their son were alive again.

"A Haunted House" (1921), by Virginia Woolf, is a short story about two ghosts who come back to a house in which they had been very happy.

Elizabeth Bowen's "Pink May" (1945) concerns a woman who is cheating on her husband during wartime and is haunted by a female ghost. The marriage breaks up shortly thereafter.

"Mysterious Kor" (1945) is Elizabeth Bowen's short story about a woman and her soldier-lover who invent a mysterious city to distract themselves from wartime London.

"London, 1941," Mervyn Peake's poem of Lon-don during the Blitz, humanizes the architectural devastation of London.

"The Demon Lover." Charles Williams's novel concerning interaction between the living and living dead amid the bombed-out ruins of post-war London. Of Williams and his fiction, T. S. Eliot once wrote, "For the reader who can appreciate them, there are terrors in the pit of darkness into which he can make us look; but in the end, we are brought nearer to what another modern explorer of the darkness has called 'the laughter at the heart of things.'"

Further Study

Austin, Allan E. *Elizabeth Bowen,* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989, 100 p.

A study of Bowen's life and works, with a chapter on the short stories, giving her literary and historical context.

Book Review Digest, 1946, pp. 83-84.

Entry consists of excerpts from contemporary book reviews of Bowen's collection of short stories in which "The Demon Lover" first appeared.

Partridge, A. C. "Language and Identity in the Shorter Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen," in *Irish Writers and Society at Large,* Irish Literary Studies 22, edited by Masaru Sekine, Colin Smythe & Barnes and Noble, 1985, pp. 169-80.

This article compares Bowen's short fiction to that of Henry James. It only refers to the collection of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, and does not analyze the title story.

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Farrelly, John. "The Art of Elizabeth Bowen," in *New York Times Book Review,* April 7, 1946, pp. 1, 37.

Green, James L. and George O'Brien. "Elizabeth Bowen," in *Critical Survey of Short Fiction,* edited by Frank N. Magill, pp. 261-8. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1993.

May, Charles E. "'The Demon Lover,' by Elizabeth Bowen, 1945," *Reference Guide to Short Fiction,* edited by Noelle Watson, pp. 688-9. Detroit: St. James Press, 1994.

Stern, James. "War and Peace," in *New Republic,* April 29, 1946, pp. 628- 630.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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