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Edited by

AYLİN ATİLLA
DAVID WATERMAN
CARLOS A. SANZ MINGO

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Capabilities and Qualities of the Genre in Revelation: Trauma in "The Demon Lover"

Ferah İncesu

Introduction

The British writer Elizabeth Bowen's short story "The Demon Lover," "First published in The Listener in November 1941" (Calder 91), is based on isolation and mystery. Mrs Drover discloses her strained personality inside her deserted house as the micro setting within an evacuated city setting at wartime. The tale ends with a plot reference to the legend of the Demon Lover as she makes the impression that she is being kidnapped. Hence, some readers and critics like Allan E. Austin (117) and Daniel V. Fraustino (483) handle the text as a ghost story or mystery fiction. Some others such as Douglas A. Hughes (411), Margaret Church (158) and Anna Kedra-Kardela (53) suitably focus on its psychological implications for a reading on trauma.

Mrs Drover's life, stuck between the two world wars, losing her fiancé in the first and her conventional order in the second, turns into a self-reflexive tunnel with converging echoes and images of war. The protagonist's personal oppression and anxieties may be reinforced within a collective trauma. Pertinently, the plot is constrained within just few hours about one individual and around her perception of and mood about one object, yet with compact subtlety and suggestive verbal and narrative devices and elements.

Bowen's diction, style, and choice of genre concord with symptoms and reflections of trauma. Writers and critics such as E.A. Poe, Henry James, A. Chekhov, Boris Éjxenbaum, Ian Reid, C.E. May, A.L. Kennedy, John Beevers, Viorica Patea, and Vittoria Intonti have highlighted a slice of life or specialty, an expansion of or a concentration on the moment (Kennedy 2-3, 4; Beevers 16-7, 20; Patea 8-10, 15), impressions and a mood (Patea 18-9; Iftekharuddin 225) within the scope and capabilities of the short story genre, and brevity (Kennedy 3; Patea 3), narrative economy (Kennedy 6; Beevers 20-3; Patea 8, 10-3, 16; Lerena 186-202; Intonti 20-1), and condensation (Kennedy 5-6; Patea 3, 8, 10-4) among its qualities. The economical strategy of Bowen's text via symbols, shifts of voice, evasion, casual info, and punctuation marks such as em dashes,

ellipses and colons renders traces of trauma, which are studied by Cathy Caruth, Henry Krystal, Laura S. Brown, Kai Erikson, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, B.A. van der Kolk, O. van der Hart, and R.J. Lifton, such as senses of disintegration/void (Krystal 85; Erikson 183), guilt (Krystal 86; van der Kolk and Hart 178), being haunted and caught by the past (Felman 30; Caruth, "Introduction" 151-2; Kolk and Hart 159), obsession (Caruth, "Introduction" 5; Laub 64), isolation (Felman 15, 35; Kolk and Hart 163; Erikson 186), amnesia (Caruth, "Introduction" 152), distortion (Laub 64; Krystal 87), panic/numbness (Krystal 85; Brown 100; Caruth, "Interview" 134, 137; van der Kolk and Hart 175; Erikson 184), and divided self (Krystal 85; Caruth, "Interview" 137; van der Kolk and Hart 164).

Analysis

Bowen's subjective diction with metaphoric and affective language tinges the physical environment, and manifests the woman's perception as focalisation is on her. "The Demon Lover" pertinently starts with sense of loss. "Towards the end of her day in London" Mrs Drover goes to "her shut-up house" and "It was late August" (Bowen 2). The evacuated home with boarded up and shuttered windows is identified in pun with a silenced person. As the protagonist's day in her old locality is coming to its end, summertime and nature's liveliness are fading away. The "steamy, showery day" (2) also suggests mystification and deprivation of ease. When Mrs Drover is approaching home, the interval of the rain is described in terms of hardship and infringement; "the trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun" (2). The prospect is gloomy too: "Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out" (2). Analogy and symbolism allude to accumulation of unpleasant impressions or feelings, further to oppression and the uncanny: "In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up"[2] (2). An idea of distortion of reality or a tinge of paranoia is generated early: "no human eye watched Mrs Drover's return" (2). There is only a cat, which can be also associated with uncanny sensibilities or figures like witches. The transition into the closed home reflects difficulty, introversion and fatality too: "she slowly forced round her latchkey in an unwilling lock, then gave the door, which had warped, a push with her knee. Dead air came out to meet her" (2).

Brooding wraps the protagonist inside the house too. The "traces of her long former habit of life" are substantiated by "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, on the door being thrown open widely, the china handle had always hit the wall. The piano, having gone away to be stored, had left what looked like claw-marks on its part of the parquet" (Bowen 2). The images respectively relate to a colour of melancholy, abandonment, hurt, repetition/ constraint, aggression/ violence, departure/ evasion/ suppression, impression/ engravement, and destructiveness. Mrs Drover's state of mind and her new impressions concerning the emblems of her old ordinary lifestyle are all blended with concepts and symptoms of disturbance. Kali Tal's and Judith Herman's remarks point to the connection between war and trauma: "An individual is traumatised by a life threatening event" (Tal 15), "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (Herman 33). The wartime has subverted the mundane context; the old order and its objects, the familiar setting have been dismantled. The house is not home; furniture is devoid of the function of property; marks of past life are just stains or filth dissociated from human contact. The war has decontextualised the household. Hence, the person among these out-of-context objects is dislocated in the way the narrator says of Mrs Drover to be "perplexed" (Bowen 2). Church, accordingly, regards "[t]he effects of war on the individual and the resulting dislocation" as the subjects in the text (158). Mrs Drover's way of life and sense of order are distorted by the war. Strangeness of the new inimical circumstances may induce self-estrangement and forgetfulness; a divided self. Elizabeth Waites talks of such disorganisation, fragmentation and disruption in trauma (qtd. in Kedra-Kardela 49). A warstruck person can feel deserted by life and joy, thus imprisoned in her mind with a personal isolation, split by old, familiar, thus 'safe' routine, and can come to inhabit her earlier manner of living, in a way, her past. The condensed language of the short story alludes to all these social and psychological issues. The "cold hearth" (Bowen 2) and unnameable film over the objects illustrate passage of time without human presence and suggest covering layers of consciousness. Personification of the evacuated house and its instrumentalisation in the disclosure of Mrs Drover's mental states signal its identification with the protagonist's entity or the mind. Her shattered, traumatised mind may be also alluded by "some cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing" (2). The site of "the things she wanted", "a bedroom chest" (2), is also an image of privacy, or self-enclosure/constraint, secrecy/evasiveness, and the subconscious.

Like the diction, the narrative technique renders subjectivity and stress. The narration enters the mind of the protagonist; the limited omniscient third

person narration and indirect speech give way to direct speech, interior monologue or soliloquy. Yet, this kind of mental and emotive exposition not only emits bits of information but also withholds and empties knowledge. Bowen employs relevant punctuation marks like em dashes and ellipses to signal and reinforce the gaps. While the em dash between the phrase "traces of her long former habit of life" (2) and the list seems to announce the explanation, as Mrs Drover's thoughts and feelings about these traces are transferred to the furniture, this punctuation mark emphasises a hindered personality. While the woman tends upstairs for the chest, the plot and narration disrupt an announcement of reflection. There is a break in thought with the break in sentence structure as Mrs Drover's attention is caught supposedly by an incongruous object. The third person narration yields to a direct conveyance of the protagonist's reflection, or rather, the structure broken with the em dash may apply to both types of account, suggestively on the topic of cracks by the bombing: "Not that one could do anything—" (2) can cover up and evade. In the darkness it would be hard to identify the sheet of paper as a personal letter, yet interestingly the account immediately specifies it. On the one hand omniscient narration may function, on the other hand Mrs Drover may already know. The letter is crystallised in the narration as a cause and extension of the woman's trauma or tension. This object's delivery, kind and content all constitute mystery and problem. Though the protagonist is described as "prosaic" and tries to rationalise and receive the letter, ambivalence is also generated by the verbal structure and the em dash concerning the letter: "She thought first—then the caretaker *must* be back" (2). If the second statement is the first's object, there are alternatives of punctuation to employ; and the present one might as well stand for a disruption, thus omission rather than completion of the woman's thought. Ellipsis contributes to dual possibilities too: "But it cannot be important, or they would know" (3). Although the sentence sounds to finish, one may still ask what they would know. Besides, the letter is so important to her that instead of having a look at it, she "rapidly" takes it to her bedroom to read (2). This setting is of privacy and alludes to one's love life. The scene might recall a young girl who has received a love letter and hastens to her bedroom to read in secrecy. Mrs Drover seems confused and irresolute. Owing to her sense of intrusion, in the room she is said to have "reluctance" (3), interestingly a term of sexual context. The em dash emphasises the agent as "someone contemptuous of her ways" (3). Even before reading, this tiny light object left "in the dusk and the dust" (3) is able to strain her. It might stand for a kind of self-punishment or suggest some pricks of conscience since she is so ready for antagonism and threat. The elipsis in the closing of the letter also constitutes omission and ambiguity: "Until then . . ." (3) What? Also, colons economically serve to focus on casual explanation and signal tension and omen throughout the text as in the view over the gardens, "the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank lawns seemed already to smoke with dark" (3). The few lines and date of the letter are preceded by colon too. Interestingly, the greeting of the letter has colon instead of comma; it sounds that Mrs Drover's name or identity is equated to the promise to her old fiancé, to their anniversary.

While we do not know the man's name as the letter/the announcement of his supposed return is not signed in full but just given an initial, K might as well stand for the woman's own name, Kathleen. The supposedly dead fiancé becomes an echo or emblem of the woman. In a context of disbelief in ghosts and supernatural elements, the case would be otherwise strange. How would a past lover of 25 years ago know the exact day of her visit to her married house, or why would he return exactly on this anniversary instead of an earlier one? The epistolary statement says "nothing has changed" (Bowen 3); how can it be when, let alone these two people, two world wars are concerned? Then, it can be the sentiment of somebody who has been passing through repetitive wartime conditions. "I was sorry to see you leave London" (3) would mean he has been watching out for her, why hasn't he faced the woman? Shall we think the man hid himself owing to a physical distortion or maim, and gets better and decides to emerge "at the hour arranged" (3)? Or else, as well as taking some back, Kathleen Drover shows the potential to leave some object at the house like the ring on the escritoire. Is it valid in case of the notice, too? It is a reminder of her pledge on his presumed return. Can it be that she forgets having written and directed it at herself? If so, unconscioussness, or the subconscious or a delirium is concerned. Kedra-Kardela suitably says "the application of trauma-based critical approaches allows for a re-evaluation to be made of literary texts dealing with this theme. [...] this perspective enables us to understand better the apparently inexplicable phenomena and strange patterns of behaviour described by Bowen in 'The Demon Lover'" (56).

The character had a trauma but no help, and a new one has been triggering her traumatised self to emit symptoms. Body and soul she exemplifies post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She is frightened, gets anxious, depressed and paranoid, revolts, attempts to rationalise and deny the situation and pacify herself. At worse, she has duality, flashback, histeria, hallucination, amnesia and a breakdown. All these specific, relevant and

interconvertible responses unfold a crisis. Blood is drawn out of her lips. "She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror" (3) yet only to look at urgently and stealthily and leave it abruptly as if fearing her self. As if the letter were capable to do something to her, "she could not keep from looking over her shoulder" (4). Among ellipses, again evasive, she revolts: "How should I . . . ? After twenty-five years. . . ." (4) The memorandum-like letter does not reflect a direct threat but sounds like projection: "you will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary, and the day we said. [...] I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. [...] satisfied that you would be back in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged" (3). Mrs Drover's state is an inversion of Cinderella's tale; whereas Cinderella's observation of the anticipated hour would save her integrity, Kathleen's would perish her according to her. As she does not know the suggested hour, "with rapidly heightening apprehension she counted each of the slow strokes" (4) of the clock of the church relating to a sense of doom. Her anxiety and paranoia increase to such a peak that keeping her search in the chest "with her back exposed to the empty room" becomes impossible and she sits on a chair "whose back was firmly against the wall" (5). Losing consistency, after thinking "she was in a mood", she "for two or three seconds shutting her eyes, told herself that she had imagined the letter" (5, 6). She locks the door, recalling a case of self-imprisonment and punishment. Her exclusion of a supernatural method for the letter's arrival does not mean a bonus for her state of mind as her reasoning turns around the man and the confrontation as a fixed idea. Interestingly, according to her, not she but the past lover is the obsessive one: "He was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well" (6). She has unbalanced ideas about him: "What did he do, to make me promise like that? I can't remember—But she found that she could" (6). Neither she nor the narrator discloses it. Her consciousness is suppressed, she is evasive. She claims that she remembers all his remarks and actions. As another sign of her stress and obsession she cannot remember his face attributing vulnerability and victimisation to her; she is to be caught up with somebody whom she would not recognise, thus cannot be on her guard against. Her statement about the uniformed lover's hold of her hand on his breast in their last farewell sounds like another obsession or traumatic emblem: "That cut of the button on the palm of her hand was, principally, what she was to carry away" (4). Allusion to Christ's palm wounds signals her sense of victimisation, and her looking for the mark after so many years is a display of the subconscious. Her ability to think soundly and fully declines. Because she forgets the telephone is disconnected, taxi facility as a shield to her solitary, helpless position makes her visualise herself walking down the hall and brings "her normal breathing" in vain (6). The narration has ellipsis here presumably for her inarticulate disappointment and resentment. Her body language expresses stress and anger as "She tugged at a knot she had tied wrong" (6). Under stress fine motor skills like hand dexterity deteriorate, as the survival expert Cody Lundin lists the symtomps (52). Like a hysteric she listens to the house, feels a current of air to induce the idea of someone leaving the building from a door or window at the basement. But, this is a bombarded house, which might have any crack or shatter. She thinks "To fly?", "The idea of flight" (Bowen 6). Yet, as a married woman with children and relatives, she feels obliged to take the objects she has come for as she explained to her family in the country house. The solution she is able to think is to go to the taxi rank, get the driver to take her parcels out and move away. It is to escape. No clarification, no facing, no solution. Uncured trauma and a current one would not allow. Her supposed escape leads her to a breakdown. Suggestively, it is she who is going out of the house after the statement positioning her to notice somebody leaving the house secretly. In bare paranoia she hardly curbs her impulse to look backwards, and only reaching "the square where people went on living, she grew conscious of, and checked, her unnatural pace" (7). Although she regards the place as "the ordinary flow of life" (7), in her strained mind and sense of isolation it only provides contrast to her domestic experience. Hence, the idea of a saviour taxi easily turns into an image of threat at first sight. Mrs Drover's paranoid state is such that the only taxi in the rank "appeared already to be alertly waiting for her" (7). The end of the tale is apocalyptic. The driver starts the engine at the moment she holds the door, without her directive he turns the cab as he ought to do for the house. Mrs Drover scratches the glass panel to check him out, the driver gears down and turns back. The woman comes to eye to eye with the man by the sudden movement of the car only to scream. While they continue on the road, she continues to beat on the panel and scream. Even though, like the letter, the taxi driver's actions do not directly mean threat or aggression, Mrs Drover's panic, opposition and self-defence show that she feels like being kidnapped.

It relates to the ballad "Demon Lover" with similar themes of betrayal, deception and punishment. A woman married with children deserts her family as her former lover returns after seven years and claims her troth; but it is the Devil taking her to hell ("The Daemon Lover"). The identity of the soldier in Mrs Drover's memory is devilish too. In an interior monologue, she assesses him: "He was never kind to me, not really. I don't remember him kind at all.

Mother said he never considered me" (Bowen 6). But, the phrases sound like self-persuasion, also with reference to Mother as authority. After her promise, obviously to wait for him as in the folktale, she already passed through a crisis: "the complete suspension of *her* existence during that August week. I was not myself—they all told me so at the time. She remembered—" (7). The em dash seems to distinguish public opinion rather than personal feelings. The flashback to the farewell scene does not help outpour either. The modes of story within story and indirect speech fit distance in time and general evasion. The image of the soldier is drawn ghostly and dark, but it might as well be a mental and psychological distortion. Robert L. Calder recalls the women married with children, also bruised with a sense of insecurity and loss at sight of uniformed men like ghosts of their maidenhood (93-4).

Stripped of subjective narration, the flashback might as well exhibit a young oppressed couple in a fierce adult world. It is 1916, a time of imperialistic, capitalistic, demanding patriarchy and conservative society. To get privacy in farewelling as the soldier has to return to his duty abroad, they are in the garden at dark. The young man seems to be after solemnity and faith as death is always a possibility in war whereas the girl needs intimacy and ease. She lacks self-knowledge. She is frustrated not to get physically close to her fiancé: "Now and then—for it felt, from not seeing him at this intense moment, as though she had never seen him at all— she verified his presence for these few moments longer by putting out a hand [...] Being not kissed, being drawn away from and looked at intimidated Kathleen till she imagined spectral glitters in the place of his eyes [...] You're going away such a long way" (Bowen 4). She would like to run to "the safe arms of her mother and sister, and cry: 'What shall I do, what shall I do? He has gone'" (4). This sounds like attachment and care, and sense of helplessness against loss. Her family is said to know "almost nothing about" the young man (5); it might mean that she has chosen him out of her will and pleasure and not with societal concerns. It can be love even if the narrative does not acknowledge it. Meanwhile, the soldier might express his own by putting her hand on his breast strongly, looking at her steadily, asking whether she is cold, trying to soothe and bind her. He responds to Kathleen's unsure questioning with positive thinking besides the spiritual undertone of a man going to the unknown: "I shall be with you [...] sooner or later. You won't forget that. You need do nothing but wait" (4). Whereas he needs a stable image, hope and optimism, the female, also understandably, does not wish to pawn her lifetime on a dead or lost man: "But that was—suppose you—I mean, suppose" (4). The dashes suggest reluctance and anxiety. At the age of 19, self-centered as a young person, Kathleen does not seem ready for obligations and harshness of war. She regards her experience as unique and the man as unjustly demanding: "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" (5). Yet, the soldier's remark "You know what we said" (4) negates Kathleen's claim of imposition and cruel selfishness on the part of the fiancé. It sounds that both parties pledged though the narrative evolves around the female's loyalty.

The protagonist young or old does not seem to be in condition to judge the soldier impartially and wisely. Kathleen's trauma accelerates when the troth, whose symbolism and pragmatics are untransparent to her, is to be realised at the loss of the soldier some months later. Her self-alienated response is pertinently conveyed from outside point of view: "Kathleen behaved well [...] Her family not only supported her but were able to praise her courage without stint [...] They hoped she would, in a year or two, console herself—" (5). Dissatisfaction, shock and oppression might as well give way to personal superstition and apocalyptic sense: "had it been only a question of consolation things might have gone much straighter ahead. But her trouble, behind just a little grief, was a complete dislocation from everything" (5). She could not manage to mourn, thus reconcile and close. Kathleen obviously develops obsession and angst, an existence full of anxiety. Her mind and life petrify. With her low libido/ life and sexual energy, as in many psychological ailments (Knott), "for years she failed to attract men" (Bowen 5). The course of her life following Mr Drover's courtship is quickly and impersonally summed up suggesting restraint and evasion again. "Her movements as Mrs Drover were circumscribed, and she dismissed any idea that they were still watched" (5) is an ambivalent statement suggesting both public surveilance on a maid and the spectral lover's brooding. As her solitary wait ends and she starts a family, it breaks her promise rendering betrayal. The memory of the old lover as a hard military man and diabolic figure may function to exonerate and set her free in her conscience. It might be a distortion by her traumatic self. Mrs Drover's blockage about the soldier's face deprives him of individual reality. She might as well lose connection to her younger self, and out of the uncured trauma of losing a man she was attached to and promised, as a survival means and self-defence against sense of guilt her mind yields to distortion and denial. Her conventional lifestyle as a married woman is a shield to the memory as well. When this calm order itself turns into a memory by the new war, the memory of

the former trauma visits her. As Kristine A. Miller indicates, "London was bombed every night from September 7 to November 2, 1940, and the city suffered 13 major attacks by V-1 and V-2 rockets between January and March of 1944. In total, the blitz damaged or destroyed over 3 1/2 million homes" (138), and "civilians experienced a violence previously known only by soldiers on the front line" (140). The two traumas, consequences of two world wars, converge and feed one another: "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—and at this crisis the letter-writer had, knowledgably, struck. The hollowness of the house this evening cancelled years on years of voices, habits and steps" (Bowen 5). The character's state fits in with the categories Lundin indicates: "People at greater risk for developing symptoms of PTSD are those who were 'in the middle' of the disaster itself, had multiple stressors at one time, and/or have a past history of trauma" (45). The "hat-brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down", her neglect "to put on any more powder since she left the shop" and "her now rather thinner throat" (Bowen 3) signal that her libido lowers again. Suppression of early trauma engenders uncared and denied vulnerability: "Mrs Drover's most normal expresion was one of controlled worry, but of assent. Since the birth of the third of her little boys, attended by a quite serious illness, she had had an intermittent muscular flicker to the left of her mouth, but in spite of this she could always sustain a manner that was at once energetic and calm" (3-4). She is "a woman whose utter dependability was the keystone of her family life" (6).

Conclusion

Kathleen Drover is an offspring of a society whose government prepared a slogan poster "Keep calm and carry on" to spread in case of invasion in WW2 ("History"), and before that, for generations it had adopted mottos "Keep your chin up" ("Keep") and "Keep your upper lip stiff" ("stiff"), and demanded cheerful obedience from its young (Hendrick 23). There is a hard core in, in other words, a habitual social veneer on her. Yet, as the postnatal depression and its mark, the twitch, disclose, the woman's psyche needs to discharge and express all the accumulated and suppressed suffering and responses. The conformist female comes to be a demon lover customising the traditional myth in the way she lets herself be accustomed to the ways of prevalent society. It is a 20th-century bonus on the part of Elizabeth Bowen that utilising the compatible provisions of the short story genre such as concentration, special and weird subject and mood, condensed and economic narration, compact and suggestive language, and evasive diction via em dash, ellipsis and colon she acknowledges the traumatised character's distortions and self-division in consequence of restraint and denial.

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