The Demon Lover

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ELIZABETH BOWEN

Elizabeth Bowen was born in Ireland in 1899 but moved to England in 1907 and was educated in London. During the First and Second World Wars, she travelled frequently between Ireland and England. The wars made a huge impact on Bowen, which can be seen in her fiction. Her first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Encounters*, was published in 1923, and her best-known works include the novels *The House in Paris* (1935) and *The Death of the Heart* (1938). She inherited Bowen's Court, an Irish country manor, in 1930. Though she continued to live primarily in England, many writers including Virginia Woolf, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Iris Murdoch, visited her there. In the 1940s and 1950s, driven by the need to make money, she wrote extensively in the form of articles, reviews and travelogues. She died of lung cancer, in London, in February of 1973.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Second World War was ongoing (1939 to 1945) at the time Bowen wrote "The Demon Lover" between 1941 and 1944. An especially relevant aspect of the war to this story is The Blitz, a systematic bombing on London by Nazi Germany that lasted from 1940 to 1941. The Blitz destroyed around 60% of homes in London, and the city was largely deserted as its inhabitants had evacuated to the countryside in order to avoid the bombings by the German offensive.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bowen's direct influences include Henry James, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. She has been compared to Edith Wharton for her mannered portrayals of aristocracy. Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* also seems related, as it tackles nostalgia for the English aristocracy, and Waugh's Second World War trilogy *Sword of Honour* (1952–61) is also in the same cultural milieu as much of Bowen's fiction. Like Bowen, Graham Greene's wartime fiction studies how military conflict impacts on personal relationships. His short novel *The End of the Affair* (1951) is also set in London between 1942–46, and it blends thriller-like tension with studies of moral and psychological ambiguity in a vein similar to Bowen. In describing the wartime experiences of *women*, Bowen shares thematic similarities with Doris Lessing, most notably in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), which is an account of the fractured lives of British women after the war. More broadly, in its depiction of a woman struggling within of a paternalistic society with ambiguous supernatural undertones, "The Demon Lover" is comparable with Shirley Jackson's *Hangsaman* (1951). It is important to note that Bowen herself made a clear distinction that, while "The Demon Lover" and other similar stories are certainly wartime works, they are not *war stories*: there is no account of the actions of war: air raids, battle etc. Rather, they are accounts the traumatized and charged sub-consciousnesses that took hold of the population during the war in England. In this way, Bowen's work distinguishes itself from other wartime authors such as Joseph Heller and Norman Mailer.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Demon Lover
- **When Written:** 1941-1944
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1945
- **Literary Period:** modernism
- **Genre:** short story, gothic
- **Setting:** London during The Second World War
- **Climax:** Mrs. Drover's abduction by the demon lover
- **Antagonist:** the demon lover
- **Point of View:** close third person

EXTRA CREDIT

British Spy: During the First World War, Bowen lived in Ireland and reported on Irish opinion to the British Ministry of Information, which has caused some critics to describe her as a spy.

Art School: In 1918, Bowen began two terms at the London County Council of Art, but realized she was better suited to writing and went on to study journalism.

PLOT SUMMARY

It is late August during the Second World War, and Kathleen Drover has returned to her **house** in London. She has come to collect items she will bring back to her family, who are currently living in the countryside to avoid bombings in the city. Inside, Mrs. Drover marvels at how deteriorated the house has become and how strange the once familiar setting now feels to her. As she makes her way upstairs, she sees a **letter** addressed to her on the hall table.

She is confused and irritated by the letter, and lists the reasons its being there doesn't make sense. The letter's sender informs

Mrs. Drover that today is "our anniversary," and refers to their imminent meeting "at the hour arranged." Mrs. Drover becomes visibly shaken and goes to the mirror to study her own reflection, presumably in an attempt to calm herself, and then makes further attempts to ignore the letter and its effect on her by busying herself with the chest and its contents. These attempts, however, prove fruitless: as the clock begins to strike the hour, Mrs. Drover wonders if this is the hour the letter refers to. An intense flashback follows, during which the reader sees Mrs. Drover as a girl in the garden of her family home during the First World War. She is with a man who is older than her, and the reader realizes that this is her former fiancé, on leave from fighting in France. A key aspect of the flashback is Mrs. Drover's desire to leave the company of her fiancé and run back toward the house and the safety of her mother and sister. The reader also learns that Mrs. Drover "behaved well" when her fiancé was later reported missing and presumed dead, but that she struggled to enter into relationships with other men and felt disconnected from everything for some time afterwards.

Returning to the present moment, Mrs. Drover has drawn some sinister conclusions from the appearance of the letter, specifically that it was somehow sent by her former fiancé, who believes she has made a promise to meet him at her home on this very day. As such, the house now poses an immediate threat: she is trapped inside while her old fiancé presumably looms ever closer. From this point in the story, Mrs. Drover becomes entirely fixated on escape, but her efforts are continually compromised by her inability to stay focused in the present moment. Eventually, she makes a plan to exit the house and find a taxi whose driver can return to the house with her to help her collect her belongings. Feeling emboldened, she goes to the top of the stairs and feels a draft coming up from the basement, as though someone has just left the house from that area, and she now dares to leave the house herself.

Outside, Mrs. Drover makes her way to the taxi rank, where she climbs into a taxi as the clock strikes seven. For a few moments, she believes herself safe. This initial belief is quickly upturned, however, as she realizes the driver has started driving without her telling him where she's going. She tries to get his attention, and he responds by abruptly braking the car and turning around to face her. Mrs. Drover's terrified response upon seeing his face suggests that she recognizes the man as her former fiancé, perhaps under some kind of supernatural influence. The reader understands that she is in jeopardy once more, a realization made all the more potent as she had believed herself safe at last. The story closes dramatically with Mrs. Drover screaming and beating on the windows of the taxi as she is abducted into London's deserted streets.

CHARACTERS

Kathleen Drover — Mrs. Drover is the protagonist of the story, a forty-four year old woman who has returned to her **house** in London during the Second World War to retrieve items for her family who are living in the English countryside. She prides herself on her dependability as a wife and mother, and when she first enters the house she seems practical and relatively well-adjusted. As the story unfolds, however, it becomes apparent that she is of a nervous dispositions and has experienced a substantial amount of trauma in her lifetime. She was previously engaged to an unnamed man, her former fiancé, during the First World War, and this man treated her badly. Following his presumed death, she experienced a long period of immense loneliness, during which time she struggled to attract other suitors, a necessity for women at the time. Though she did eventually get married at the age of 32, she continues to suffer on account of her past. When she reads a **letter** she believes has been sent by her former fiancé, her unresolved issues cause her to experience intense feelings of detachment and anxiety, believing that she is perhaps being haunted by the ghost of her former fiancé in fulfillment of some unnamed promise she made him many years before. By the end of the story, Mrs. Drover is quite unhinged and she gets in a taxi to return to her family, but it seems that the taxi is driven by someone she is afraid of, making her fate uncertain.

The Former Fiancé —Mrs. Drover's first fiancé was a soldier during the First World War. Readers never encounter him directly (only in Mrs. Drover's flashback), but in her memory, he was cold, cruel, and mysterious. She never saw his face directly, he scarred her hand cutting it with his button, and she always felt uncomfortable and even frightened by him. Though Bowen never makes this entirely clear, it seems he is also the sender of the **letter**, signed with a "K", and the demon lover of the story's title. If this is the case, he has returned twenty-five years later to make Mrs. Drover keep an unspecified promise that she presumably made during the First World War. He provokes a breakdown of sorts in Mrs. Drover, causing her to act in an irrational way in the present. Throughout the story, he is consistently sinister, but as the plot develops there's a suggestion he has somehow, at least in Mrs. Drover's mind, transformed into a supernatural figure. At the end of the story, when Mrs. Drover gets into a taxi and reacts in horror upon seeing the driver's face, the implication is perhaps that she has come face to face with her old lover and he has come to deliver a horrible fate.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

REALITY, ILLUSION, AND TRAUMA

Twenty-five years ago, Mrs. Drover was engaged to a soldier—an unkind and mysterious man—who then died in the First World War. Somewhat relieved by his death, she married someone else and created a life. However, after fleeing London during the Second World War, she returns to her **house** to collect some belongings and finds a **letter**, signed "K," reminding her that today is "the day we said." Immediately, she thinks of her old fiancé and an "unnatural promise" she made a quarter century before. While Mrs. Drover believes that her demon lover is about to arrive with sinister intentions, Bowen remains ambiguous about whether the demon lover actually exists. At various moments throughout the story, it seems possible that he is indeed real, and at others equally possible that he is imagined. In maintaining this ambiguity, Bowen seems to suggest that each alternative poses an equally urgent threat: in one scenario, an unnatural and evil demon is coming for Mrs. Drover, and in another, her psychological trauma from her old relationship and from the wars has led her to anguish.

Bowen presents compelling evidence that the demon lover is real by showing his apparent physical presence in the world. The best evidence for this is the letter, which Mrs. Drover seems certain is from her old fiancé. It is dated with that day's date, and it suggests that the sender has been watching Mrs. Drover for a long time, which echoes something he said before leaving for war: "I shall be with you…sooner or later. You won't forget that. You need do nothing but wait." Furthermore, after she has read the letter and reflected on how best to get out of the house, the disturbed air of the basement rises up the stairs to meet her, suggesting that someone has opened a door or window through which to exit the house themselves. These physical disturbances to Mrs. Drover's home suggest concretely that there is a real, tangible presence in the house.

However, the significance of these details depends entirely on Mrs. Drover's reliability as a narrator (after all, readers have to trust her that the letter is from a dead man and that the basement air did, in fact, behave unusually), and Bowen undercuts Mrs. Drover's credibility by portraying her as confused and vulnerable. First of all, Mrs. Drover's emotional state seems fragile. The simple appearance of the letter leads her to believe she is being watched by "someone contemptuous of her ways," and reading the letter and recalling her old fiancé sends her into "a crisis." Following this, when she believes herself in danger, she continues to act in a neurotic way—for example, she fails to even recognize herself in the mirror, and she makes a somewhat illogical commitment to being out of the house before the clock strikes the next hour, just in case that brings the demon lover to her. Furthermore, it is objectively highly unlikely that Mrs. Drover's former fiancé is not only alive, but has been observing her for twenty-five years, gathering information about her life. The amount of time that has passed since her fiancé went missing, combined with the unlikely coincidence of Mrs. Drover being at the house alone on their "anniversary," makes a strong case for the demon lover being imagined. In this way, Bowen creates tension by introducing the threat of the demon lover, and then heightens the tension by making the reader question if the demon lover is in fact real or imagined.

It's possible, however, that what Mrs. Drover is experiencing is—in a sense—both real *and* imagined: Bowen explicitly suggests the demon lover might be a manifestation of Mrs. Drover's psychological trauma from her frightening relationship with her old fiancé and from the violence of living through two World Wars. One of the basic characteristics of psychological trauma is that it confuses a previous event with the present moment with such intensity that the traumatized individual feels they are living the past all over again. This seems to occur when the clock strikes the hour and the story flashes back to Mrs. Drover's final meeting with her fiancé, as though she is fully re-living the moment in the present. It seems as though the stroke of the clock has triggered this memory (traumatic recollections are often induced by loud noises), and she is unable to resist the power it holds over her. Furthermore, when she returns to the present moment, she is just as agitated as she was in the moment she remembered, underscoring the trope of a traumatic episode allowing previous emotions and responses to play out again in the present. Perhaps, then, Bowen is using the ambiguity of the demon lover's existence to mirror the feeling of psychological trauma, in which a person truly believes that a past event is recurring and behaves as such, even if that thing is safely in the past.

While it's possible that the demon lover is real, Bowen never says for sure. Depending on the reader's interpretation of the story, Mrs. Drover's behavior is either typical of a woman trying to escape a real and urgent threat, or symptomatic of a deep-seated trauma. In maintaining this uncertainty, Bowen's narration mirrors the psychology of someone suffering in the aftermath of trauma: events unfold in a confused middle-ground between past and present, and the person is unable to determine what's real or unreal. This suggests that violence is often most debilitating once its physical threat has passed, and emphasizes how trauma renders even one's immediate surroundings disorienting and opaque.

LOVE AND WAR

One reason that this story is so unnerving is that it turns the familiar cliché of wartime romance on its head. Rather than a romantic relationship between a woman and a soldier who must leave his home to protect his country, Bowen portrays Mrs. Drover's former fiancé in a

suspicious and sinister light and suggests that Mrs. Drover is with him not out of love, but fear. The man seems infected by wartime, taking on the characteristics of war: he wounds Mrs. Drover, surveilles her, and comes to haunt her domestic life many years later, in tandem with (and even seemingly as part of) another war. Indeed, Mrs. Drover is eager to escape her old fiancé both in the past and in the present, explicitly associating his presence with harm and discomfort. In this way, Bowen suggests that that soldiers are not necessarily good romantic partners, since they can take on the violence of wartime and bring it into the home.

Bowen explicitly associates Mrs. Drover's fiancé with wartime violence. She does this most clearly through making him a soldier in WWI who reappears in Mrs. Drover's life during WWII. In addition to his presence being associated with both wars, he takes on the violent characteristics of war. For example, during WWI he physically wounds Mrs. Drover—perhaps deliberately—by continually pressing her palm into his brass button until it cuts into her flesh. As Mrs. Drover registers this hurt, she intuits that he is capable of hurting her further. In addition to this physical discomfort, he surveilles her like an enemy, promising her in a threatening way that he will return sooner or later, and then leaving her the **letter**, which suggests that he has been observing her movements for the past 25 years. Much like war, the effects of Mrs. Drover's fiancé haunt her for years to come. The scar from his sharp button is still on her hand, and she still fears that her fiancé might arrive at any moment, bringing violence and terror to her life. Clearly, then, her fiancé and the war are conjoined presences, and his association with war makes him an unsuitable and violent partner.

By contradicting the notion that soldiers are all romantic heroes who deserve to come home to their eagerly-awaiting partners, Bowen raises the issue of female loyalty. The story's title is drawn from an old ballad that warned women against infidelity while their husbands or fiancés were away at war, but Bowen seems to turn this message on its head. While Mrs. Drover did indeed marry someone else after her fiancé went missing in the war and was presumed dead, Bowen does not share the ballad's perspective that Mrs. Drover should have been more loyal. Since Mrs. Drover's fiancé was cold, mysterious, and threatening, both she and her family had few regrets when he disappeared. Bowen's sinister depiction of the demon lover justifies Mrs. Drover's attitude. Furthermore, while the ballad warns against adultery, Mrs. Drover is not an adulterer: she did not meet her husband for many years after her fiancé disappeared, and in those intervening years, she did not connect with or attract other men, so there is no possibility that her relief at her old fiancé's disappearance is rooted in adulterous desire. Rather, it's clear that Mrs. Drover would prefer to be alone than to be with this sinister man.

By depicting the former fiancé as violent and sinister, and by contradicting the trope of frivolous and adulterous women, Bowen extends empathy to the spouses and partners of soldiers and critiques the sentimental melding of love and war. Instead of being obligated to wait for men (who might be made cruel by the violence in which they are participating), Bowen suggests that these women should make their own moral choices about whether their relationships are fulfilling.

IDENTITY AND ALIENATION

Throughout the story, Mrs. Drover is sometimes uncertain of both the identity of her former fiancé and her own identity, stating that she cannot recall—and perhaps has never seen—her former fiancé's face, and failing to recognize her own face in the mirror. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Mrs. Drover's dislocation of self began during the First World War (perhaps because of the trauma of wartime living, and certainly because of the emotional strain of being in a bad relationship). Furthermore, his dislocation of self is exacerbated whenever she has to think of this period of her life. As Mrs. Drover's memories are forcibly returned to the trauma of WWI and her former relationship, her struggles with uncertainty and detachment magnify and she finds herself unable to engage with her present day surroundings, even to the extent that it puts her in physical danger. Bowen thereby suggests that not only is identity capable of being compromised through trauma, but also—perversely—that a strong sense of self is necessary in order to cope with trauma.

The face is the clearest representation of a person's identity—it shows who a person is and gives clues as to what they think or feel. A major way in which Bowen troubles identity, then, is by hiding people's faces, making it seem as though their identity is inaccessible or even absent. For example, Mrs. Drover cannot remember her fiancé's face, and in her recollection of the last time she saw him, she notes that she had "not ever completely seen his face" at all. This detail raises the issue of whether Mrs. Drover has ever clearly seen his true self—his personality or character—and it suggests that, even though they are engaged, their relationship is not a close one. Furthermore, after Mrs. Drover reads the **letter**, she is disturbed to the extent that she feels "a change in her own face." She goes to look at herself in the mirror, presumably to reassure herself, but she sees herself as though she were a stranger, feeling "confronted by a woman" of forty-four years. Her inability to identify with this full, clear view of herself suggests that something sinister has happened—she has lost herself, almost as though she has been possessed.

The possibility that the demon lover makes Mrs. Drover lose her identity is also present in her recollections of him. Of the time during and directly following their engagement, Mrs. Drover recalls that she experienced "a complete dislocation from everything," and that "I was not myself—they all told me so

at the time." While the possibility that the demon lover saps Mrs. Drover of her identity is sinister enough, another (perhaps worse) interpretive possibility is that the demon lover *is* Mrs. Drover. After all, the letter is signed simply with "K" (Mrs. Drover's first name is Kathleen), and after reading the letter, her first reaction is not a memory of her fiancé, but rather a sense of her own identity shifting. Furthermore, she is the only character to come into contact with her former fiancé, and even then she never sees his face, insinuating that perhaps he does not have an identity separate from her own. Moreover, since she loses herself any time he is evoked (she describes the "complete suspension of her existence" during the time she spent with him) it could be that only one of them can exist at a given time. In this interpretation, the demon lover's supernatural presence seems less supernatural—instead of lurking in her **house**, he is simply lurking in her psyche (perhaps a play on a person's "demons" haunting them).

Regardless of whether the demon lover is real or imagined, this uncertainty around identity produces a sharp sense of alienation: the inability to meaningfully connect with others, to clearly express one's feelings or understand the feelings of other people. Bowen poses this alienation as somewhat inevitable during wartime. Not only does the nature of war cause people to spend long periods of time apart, it also results in traumatic experiences for soldiers, which in turn makes it difficult for them to interact meaningfully with friends and family once they return home. This alienation is clearly evidenced in the young Mrs. Drover, who, having learned that her fiancé is missing and presumed dead, experienced "a complete dislocation from everything." Bowen suggests that this dislocation never completely went away by presenting Mrs. Drover as disconnected and disengaged from her surroundings in the present. This is clear when Mrs. Drover enters the house; Bowen describes her as "more perplexed than she knew by everything that she saw" and when she looks in the mirror she describes herself in the third person. This suggests that she's unable to see things as they really are, and unable to look at herself too closely, perhaps for fear of what she'll see.

An emotional distance is also obvious during Mrs. Drover's final goodbye with her fiancé, as Bowen repeatedly draws attention to a lack of affection and physical contact. She describes that he treats her "without very much kindness," and does not kiss her but rather draws away from her. It seems that he is unable or unwilling to engage meaningfully and give her the affection expected of a romantic relationship. This suggests that each character is experiencing alienation and, in their way, is trying to subconsciously maintain a certain distance, perhaps in order to keep certain illusions about themselves in place, or keep parts of themselves hidden or secret, both from themselves and others.

By destabilizing the reader's view of Mrs. Drover, and Mrs. Drover's views of her fiancé and of herself, Bowen makes it impossible for Mrs. Drover and the reader to fully grasp Mrs. Drover's thoughts and intentions. It is clear that both Mrs. Drover and her fiancé have undergone experiences that cause them to lose a sense of self, either fighting in the war or experiencing a hostile and unsuitable romantic relationship. This in turn produces a powerful a sense of estrangement from other people and dislocation from the present moment and their surroundings.

PROMISES AND PUNISHMENT

At the heart of this story is an unkept promise, and the question of whether Mrs. Drover should be held accountable for her apparent failure to keep it. While the **letter** states a promise has been made, its exact terms are unclear: is the promise that Mrs. Drover would marry her fiancé, whom she believed died at war? Is the promise to meet on this day as the letter describes, which is a promise Mrs. Drover claims not to remember making? Or, is it something more sinister and terrible that she cannot quite express, a more unusual kind of pact with a figure now coming to claim what's owed to him? Bowen suggests that, whatever the terms, this is a promise Mrs. Drover shouldn't be held to keeping. Furthermore, she seems to suggest that women are often held to an unfairly high standard where romantic relationships and promises are concerned.

According to the letter, Mrs. Drover has made a promise that includes meeting the sender on this particular day and at a pre-arranged time: "You will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary, and the day we said… In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise." Regardless of whether or not Mrs. Drover did indeed enter into the promise or pact the letter alludes to, Bowen presents the agreement as morally untenable. During the flashback to the time in which the promise was allegedly made, Mrs. Drover is presented as a vulnerable teenager who is obviously uncertain of what her fiancé expects of her. Furthermore, when he tells her that he isn't going away as far as she thinks, she clearly states she doesn't understand what he means, and he replies that she doesn't have to, which makes his threat/promise to remain in her life seem one-sided and menacing, rather than mutually desired and agreed upon.

As the story develops, the reader witnesses the painful deterioration of Mrs. Drover's mental health once she learns that she's expected to meet "K." She becomes upset that the letter has caused painful memories to resurface, the effects of which threaten her present day role as a wife and mother: "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." She is also confused as to the boundary between past and present, looking to her palm to see if the wound caused by her former

fiancé's button is still there. Through these details, Bowen seems to suggest that, whatever the nature of the promise, it is placing her emotional wellbeing in jeopardy. Bowen suggests that, given the toll it is taking on her, Mrs. Drover should *not* be held to a promise she did not understand when she was a teenager, and furthermore that the wellbeing of women within such arrangements should be taken into greater account.

The story ends with Mrs. Drover's abduction, and so ultimately she is indeed punished for her failure to keep her promise: after all, she has married another man and made a life for herself, and she is determined to leave the **house** before the promised meeting can occur. However, Bowen's sympathy for Mrs. Drover's actions—regardless of whether they are breaking a promise—gives the story's ending a troubling implication: Mrs. Drover's undeserved punishment seems to be a commentary on the unfair punishment of women at large. It is again relevant that the story takes its title from an old ballad, whose lesson was that women should not forget their lovers while they're away at war. Rather than make judgements about the behaviour of women in wartime relationships, Bowen offers her empathy for Mrs. Drover, suggesting that her plight is unfair.

TIME AND REPRESSION

Mrs. Drover's relationship to time governs her actions in the story. She is consistently trying to evade the past, she becomes uncomfortable and disturbed within the present moment, and she is always looking to the immediate future as a place of safety. Though she initially enters her **house** with the intention to retrieve items from her past to use in her present life (she and her family are living in the country in an attempt to avoid bombings in London), her return to the house allows the past to overwhelm her and even, apparently, consume her life. In both the form of the demon lover and the threatening captivity of the house, Bowen suggests that the effects of the past are beyond a person's control.

At the very beginning of the story, Mrs. Drover is relatively at ease in the present moment; she moves through the house, making concrete observations about its appearance. Once Mrs. Drover reads the **letter**, however, she remembers something with "such dreadful acuteness that the twenty five years since then dissolved like smoke" and it becomes evident that the past has taken hold of her present. Furthermore, she suggests that certain memories are powerful enough to affect a person's behaviour in the present and even cause them harm. Once she has read the letter and experienced her flashback, Mrs. Drover's behaviour becomes increasingly irrational. She is eager to leave the house, but is too absorbed by recollections of how her fiancé treated her poorly to focus on the present. Mrs. Drover also either simply notes or instructs herself that "*Under no conditions* could she remember his face," suggesting that to do so would give the specter of her former fiancé greater power or solidity in the present. In this way, Bowen seems to suggest that the past is an explicitly harmful, volatile entity that can't be controlled or held at bay.

In contrast to the past, which is dangerous and ever-present, Bowen presents the immediate future as a source of comfort for Mrs. Drover—a constantly deferred time in which she believes she will be safe. When Mrs. Drover is in the garden with her fiancé, for example, she feels deeply uncomfortable in the present and she looks to the house, imagining that in a few moments she will return to it and be embraced by her mother and sister. Once she departs from her fiancé, she runs to the house—but the scene ends before she reaches her family, so it's never clear whether she finds the safety she desires there. Likewise, while Mrs. Drover is frightened inside her house in London, she sustains herself by thinking that she will be safe once a taxi driver comes to get her. However, this near future does not bring the safety she imagined: when she finally manages to exit the house and find a taxi, she is struck with terror at the sight of the driver. Though Bowen doesn't explicitly describe the driver, by Mrs. Drover's response it seems plausible that she has recognized him as her old fiancé, now somehow transformed into the demon lover. Once more her attempt to escape to a place she thought was emblematic of safety has failed, this time with greater drama as she continues screaming and beating at the windows.

That the future safety Mrs. Drover imagined turns into terror seems to be Bowen's way of insinuating that time cannot be expected to follow one's wishes—it is dangerous and unpredictable. In portraying the past as an active force that Mrs. Drover cannot avoid or bury, Bowen also seems to be making a point about the futility of repression. The flashback overwhelms Mrs. Drover entirely as she recalls, in detail, sensations and verbal exchanges with her fiancé, which suggests that this memory is alert and active beneath the surface. While Mrs. Drover may have avoided thinking about this final meeting for many years, its memory has not faded—it is still as fresh and vibrant as it was the day it occurred. Having referred to the clock marking the specific hour throughout the story, Bowen includes the word "eternity" in the final paragraph. It seems that now, after her attempts to control time and keep a clear boundary between the past and the present, time has taken over completely and any efforts to control it are now irrelevant.

Indeed, the pointlessness of attempts to control time is underscored by the plot being an almost literal return to the past, suggesting that no matter how many years go by, the past remains potent, forcing people return to it to work through unresolved issues. Mrs. Drover ardently resists this return but ultimately fails to prevent it: her old fiancé is waiting for her to pick up where they left off, behaving as though the quarter century since they last met is of no importance, and once she

has read the letter Mrs. Drover is overcome by the anxiety and concerns she experienced as a young woman. Though twenty-five years have come and gone, the past still has a strong hold on her, and the issues she faced as a teenager have not been resolved. Ultimately, Bowen leaves the reader with a troubling message regarding the past: it is simultaneously unavoidable and dangerous, and while it must be confronted, it is capable of overwhelming and destroying an individual entirely.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LETTER

When Mrs. Drover returns to her family home in London, she finds an unstamped letter that is addressed to her on the hall table. The letter represents the past and the ominous power it holds over Mrs. Drover. After she first notices the letter on the table, she attempts to rationalize its mysterious appearance and she puts off reading it, as though she suspects the effect its contents will have on her. Once she reads it, it causes her to experience a powerful flashback about her former fiancé and the struggles she faced as a young woman in an incompatible (and perhaps abusive) relationship. When she returns to the present moment, Mrs. Drover is unable to maintain a clear boundary between the present moment and the past: despite her best efforts to focus on the present, she is absorbed by recollections of her former fiancé and the physical and emotional discomfort he caused her. Ultimately, her reading of the letter symbolizes an almost literal return to the past, as it re-establishes the anxieties of a relationship that ended 25 years previously.

HOUSES

Throughout the story, houses represent the self, specifically the health of the human psyche. In the past tense of the story, Mrs. Drover's family home appears as a place of sanctuary. She is eager to flee from her former fiancé in the garden, and to run back towards the house and the safety and company of her family. This suggests that, despite the background of wartime trauma and her discomfort within her mismatched romantic relationship, she is still healthy enough to retreat into herself and find comfort and stability. This trope of the family home as sanctuary, however, is upturned in the present day. Returning to her street in London after the bombings, all of the houses have become ominous and threatening. It becomes evident that, in the context of warfare, the family home has been dislodged as a beacon of safety, and rather represents the threat of physical and psychological harm and the violence of wartime. Now, when Mrs. Drover enters her family home that she has shared with her husband and children for many years, she is submerged in traumatic memories, suggesting her mental health has substantially depleted since the First World War. This parallel between the self and the house is further established by the damage caused to the house by warfare, which is described as though it's happening to a human body: there is a "bruise" in the wallpaper and the piano has left "claw marks" on the carpet. Furthermore, Mrs. Drover's mental health continues to deteriorate and worsen the longer she spends inside the house. In this way, the house's progression from a stable sanctuary to a rundown, possibly haunted building mirrors the psychological trauma brought about by wartime violence.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor edition of *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* published in 1981.

The Demon Lover Quotes

"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. Dover's return.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 661

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Drover has just returned to her house in London—a house she no longer inhabits because she moved to the countryside to avoid the German bombing of London—and she is taking note of the condition of the street. Bowen makes clear that the street and the city at large have undergone extreme damage, but perhaps even more importantly that the *atmosphere* of the area has been totally altered by the ongoing violence of the Second World War. More pressing than the disrepair of the street is the fact that it now feels "unused" and "unfamiliar," and in this way Bowen makes clear that Mrs. Drover is experiencing a strong sense of estrangement and alienation from her home and the street she has lived on for so long. By emphasizing

that "no human eye" is observing Mrs. Drover, Bowen establishes that no other people are nearby. This makes way for tension that occurs later in the story; when Mrs. Drover believes an intruder is in the house, the reader suspects that either the intruder is not human (a potentially supernatural presence), or that, seeing as Mrs. Drover is entirely alone, the intruder is a manifestation of her subconscious.

> …looking about her, Mrs. Drover was more perplexed than she knew by everything that she saw, by traces of her long former habit of life—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 piano…had left what looked like claw marks...

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 661

Explanation and Analysis

As soon Mrs. Drover enters the house, she becomes disoriented. Her surroundings strike her as so unfamiliar that she is "more perplexed than she knew," an odd phrase that perhaps suggests that her expectation that the house would feel familiar has overridden her ability to truly recognize how much has changed or how off it feels to be there. She observes evidence of her former life there in the form of residues and stains, which suggests that the past is like a contaminant that cannot be wiped clean and ignored, and that Mrs. Drover will now have to reckon with something from her past. Furthermore, Bowen describes the violent imagery—the "bruise in the wallpaper" or the "claw marks" on the floor—as though that violence is happening to a human body, drawing a connection between the house and Mrs. Drover herself. In this way, Bowen uses Mrs. Drover's return to the house and its general disrepair to relay key aspects of Mrs. Drover's state of mind—like the house, she has been left in disarray by the war. The ominous description of the house also implies that being there will be a perilous experience.

> She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror, polished a clear patch in it, and looked at once urgently and stealthily in. She was confronted by a woman of fortyfour, with eyes starting out under a hat brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 662

Explanation and Analysis

This is a key moment in the story, occurring immediately after Mrs. Drover has read the letter. It demonstrates that the letter threatens Mrs. Drover's sense of self to the extent that she must look at her reflection for confirmation of her own identity. Rather than provide her with the comfort she seeks, however, her response to her reflection underscores Mrs. Drover's stark estrangement not only from her physical surroundings, but also from her sense of self. Even when looking at her own reflection, she is unable to see herself in personal and direct terms, and her abstract description of her own features and appearance as "a woman of forty-four" looking out from "under a hat brim… rather carelessly pulled down" makes clear that she has a hazy grasp of her own identity. Bowen's use of key words, such as "stealthily" and "confronted," also succinctly relay Mrs. Drover's frame of mind, suggesting that she feels the need to sneak up on her reflection and who/what it represents, as well as a degree of hostility when she does see herself. All of these details allude to the trauma caused not only by the war, but by this old relationship that the letter has forced her to reflect on.

> The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face… Now and then…she verified his presence for these few moments longer by putting out a hand, which he each time pressed…painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform

Related Characters: The Former Fiancé, Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 663

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears at the opening of the flashback sequence in which Mrs. Drover recalls her fiancé who died in WWI. Bowen makes clear that the young Mrs. Drover is not intimate with the solider—she has never fully seen his face, which is incredibly bizarre, and when they do make physical contact, he harms her. This is a key section in the story, as it demonstrates not only a startling lack of affection, but also that the solider is not a good romantic partner. The fact that the story is named after an old ballad about the dangers of adulterous women betraying their lovers who are away at war is important here. By presenting her former fiancé as violent—almost as though he has *absorbed* the violence of warfare—Bowen turns the trope of soldiers making good and deserving partners on its head and suggests not only that Mrs. Drover is not safe within this relationship, but that it makes sense for her to break her promise to her former fiancé and to try and escape him.

It's also worth noting the intangibility of his presence here. Mrs. Drover has to "verify" his presence by trying to touch him, as though she is uncertain that he is actually there. Furthermore, she has not ever seen his face completely, and the face is where people think of identity being concentrated, so this suggests that he either lacks identity altogether or that there are significant things she doesn't know about him. This passage therefore bolsters the reading that the demon lover is not real—that he's a figment of Mrs. Drover's imagination whose presence she herself cannot even confirm.

> Only a little more than a minute later she was free to run up the silent lawn. Looking in through the window at her mother and sister, who did not for the moment perceive her, she already felt that unnatural promise drive down between her and the rest of all humankind.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 663

Explanation and Analysis

Appearing at the end of the flashback sequence, this quote shows Mrs. Drover running back toward her family home, here represented as a place of safety and comfort, the house itself an embodiment of Mrs. Drover's wellbeing and her healthy sense of self. The fact that she isn't seen by her mother and sister, however, is very important, as it suggests that even though Mrs. Drover may still be equipped to find solace in both her own self and her family home, some irreparable damage has already been caused that prevents her from engaging with them directly. This is underscored by the dramatic image of her now being at a remove from not only her family but from the "rest of all humankind." In this way, Bowen suggests that the alienation and trauma Mrs. Drover has suffered within this relationship have already taken root and will have far-reaching consequences. This moment also lends moral credibility to Mrs. Drover's desire to break her promise to her old fiancé. Whatever that promise was, it clearly never had any benefit to Mrs. Drover, even in the moment she made it. It seems, then, as though that "promise" was always more of a threat.

> But her trouble, behind just a little grief, was a complete dislocation from everything. She did not reject other lovers, for these failed to appear. For years, she failed to attract men—and with the approach of her thirties she became natural enough to share her family's anxiousness on the score.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 664

Explanation and Analysis

As Mrs. Drover reflects on her young adulthood, there is no doubt that her relationship with her former fiancé caused her a great deal of psychic harm that she never fully recovered from. Importantly, as she struggled to move on and did not easily enter into relationships with other men, Bowen makes clear that her decision to eventually marry a man other than her former fiancé was not motivated by lust or adulterous impulses. This raises questions around whether or not Mrs. Drover should be punished for failing to keep her promise, given that her life was lonely and isolated for an extended period of time after he disappeared—even if she wasn't mourning him, she suffered greatly already, which seems like consequence enough. Furthermore, Bowen references the anxiety that resulted from her inability to attract a husband, invoking the pressure on women to be married young in order to achieve a certain social status and stability. By including these pressures, Bowen creates a sense of empathy for Mrs. Drover's plight—she was in a difficult situation, and readers are unlikely to conclude that she deserves to be held to

whatever promise it was.

> …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 just this crisis the letter writer had… struck. The hollowness of the house… cancelled years on years of voices, habits, and steps.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 664

Explanation and Analysis

At this stage in the story, Mrs. Drover's present-day sense of self is becoming dangerously unstable, and the image of the worn down house ties in with the steady deterioration of her mental health. She is sufficiently self-aware, however, to identify that her family home and the stability and comfort that it represents has been compromised, and the house itself is hollow and empty of meaning. Given Bowen's previous connections between Mrs. Drover's sense of herself and the house, this suggests that her inner resources and her grasp of her own identity have also been irreparably damaged. Any comfort she might have taken from her role as mother and wife has been obliterated, and she can no longer rely on her memories to tell her who she is. She is forced to acknowledge that time and memory are beyond her control. Furthermore, the letter has proven that memory is the point at which she is the most vulnerable, underscoring the ongoing suggestion of failed repression.

> 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… *Under no conditions* could she remember his face.

Related Characters: The Former Fiancé, Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 665

Explanation and Analysis

This quote again makes clear that Mrs. Drover's identity was compromised by her relationship with her former fiancé, but goes a step further in stating that she ceased to exist at all. This seems a strong suggestion that there is another element to her persona that took over at this time, and that the demon lover might be this same persona, a manifestation of her subconscious. This is again suggested by her unwillingness or inability to recall her former fiancé's face: it seems, rather than having forgotten what he looks like, that she is willing herself not to recall his appearance, either because to do so will give him greater power in the present moment or because it will bring an unbearable truth to the surface. This section, then, makes a strong case for the letter and its perceived threat as being Mrs. Drover's trauma finding ways to express itself and force her to reckon with a past that she has tried to repress.

> She heard nothing—but while she was hearing nothing the passé air of the staircase was disturbed by a draft that traveled up to her face. It emanated from the basement: Down where a door or window was being opened by someone who chose this moment to leave the house.

Related Characters: Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 665-666

Explanation and Analysis

This moment in the story is when Mrs. Drover finally rouses herself to action and leaves the bedroom she had locked herself inside of in order to confront her situation. Aside from the appearance of the letter, this draft is the only evidence that Mrs. Drover is being observed and pursued by a real and physical intruder who has now departed the house. In this way, Bowen introduces a strong element of suspense as the story begins to draw to a close. The reader must consider the fact that Mrs. Drover is not imagining the demon lover, but that he may indeed be a real presence who has come to do her harm. Importantly, however, this detail is still delivered from Mrs. Drover's point of view, and so Bowen maintains a degree of uncertainty: though the draft seems a tangible piece of evidence, it is not impossible that Mrs. Drover has imagined or misperceived its occurrence.

Through the aperture driver and passenger, not six inches between them, remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs. Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream. After that she continued to scream freely…as the taxi…made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets.

Related Characters: The Former Fiancé, Kathleen Drover

Related Themes:

Page Number: 666

Explanation and Analysis

This troubling and dramatic image marks the end of the story. Having gotten into the taxi and believed herself safe for a few moments, Mrs. Drover realizes all too quickly that she is still in extreme peril. Judging from Mrs. Drover's expression, it seems that she has recognized the taxi driver as her former fiancé who has reappeared after twenty-five years, perhaps having undergone some supernatural transformation into the demon lover. The reader realizes that, whether or not Mrs. Drover is indeed worthy of punishment, she will be punished regardless. She has failed to escape her past, either in the form of her own subconscious or in the real and physical form of her former fiancé, returned now in the form of the demon lover. The word "eternity" is highly important as, after Mrs. Drover's continued focus on the exact time, it now seems clear that time has no meaning and her torment will be endless.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE DEMON LOVER

Kathleen Drover, a woman in her forties, has returned to her **house** in London during the Second World War. She has come to collect items that she will bring back to her family in the country, where they are living to avoid the bombs being dropped on the city. She reflects on how her family has grown accustomed to life in the country, and on how empty and damaged the street—and the city at large—feels to her. It requires an effort on her part to get into the house because it has been shut up for so long, but following a struggle with the front door she manages to get inside.

Due to the bombs dropped on London during The Blitz at the start of The Second World War, many families moved to the countryside. The deserted and ruined street Mrs. Drover returns to has a sense of desolation and estrangement, and the effort required to get into the house creates a sense of foreboding, suggesting her visit will be difficult and testing.

Once inside the house, Mrs. Drover reflects on how dirty and damp her family home has become. The absent furniture has left marks and indentations that seem strange and unnerving, and she feels entirely estranged from this once-familiar setting. As Mrs. Drover makes her way upstairs, she sees a **letter** on the hall table. Its very appearance—never mind the lack of a stamp and the fact it is addressed to her—makes no sense, as nobody has been inside the house for some time and no one knows she is due to be there today.

The disrepair of the family home suggests it has been tainted by the violence and damage of warfare. The house being stained with previous use and activity also suggests that the past has left a kind of residue behind. The letter is another kind of intrusion: its appearance cannot be explained, and it emphasizes that all is not as it should be.

Though reluctant to read the **letter**, Mrs. Drover does so upstairs in her bedroom. The sender writes, "You will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary," and that "You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged." Strangely, it seems the sender has been observing her for some time and has knowledge of her life and her movements over the years. It is also clear that the sender believes Mrs. Drover has made them a promise, though it less clear what exactly this promise entails.

When Mrs. Drover reads the letter, the past floods into the present moment. The suggestion that the sender has been observing her for some time and expects her to keep a promise she made a long time ago also reaffirms this sense of the past taking over the present. The fact that the terms of her promise are not specified seems ominous—clearly, whatever it is, she is expected to understand what the sender means and fulfill her mysterious obligation.

Though disturbed by the contents of **the letter** and the fact that it is marked with that day's date, Mrs. Drover attempts to ignore it. She goes to the mirror to study her own reflection, where she is "confronted by a woman of forty-four," and she describes how she has aged she has aged and how giving birth to three sons has taken a toll on her body. She next attempts to distract herself by going through a chest and retrieving the items she has come to collect, but she cannot stop looking behind her at the letter on the bed. As the clock strikes six o'clock, she anxiously begins to wonder which precise hour the letter referred to.

Mrs. Drover's is unable to see herself in a direct and personal way. She can only view herself abstractly, and seems to have a hazy sense of her of own identity, perhaps brought on by emotionally testing experience of living through two world wars as well as the discomfort of being in a relationship with a man who treated her unkindly.

In a flashback, Mrs. Drover is a "young girl" talking to a soldier whose face "she had not ever completely seen." She reaches out with her hand, which he in turn presses "without very much kindness, and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform" until the button cuts her palm. He is nearing the end of his leave from France. The soldier draws away from her, and she in turn looks back to the house, imagining being returned to the company of her mother and sister. She tells the man, her fiancé, that she is concerned that "You're going away such a long way." He replies, "Not so far as you think." He also tells her "I shall be with you…sooner or later. You won't forget that. You need do nothing but wait." The young Mrs. Drover runs back up toward her family home a few moments later.

As traumatic memories are often brought on by loud noises, the fact that the sound of the clock striking six causes a flashback suggests that Mrs. Drover is suffering from a trauma she is now reliving. In short, her attempts to ignore the past have proven useless. In the flashback, her desire to leave the company of her fiancé causes her to look to the immediate future as a place of safety, and underscores her troubled relationship with both the past and present moment.The confusing information from her former fiancé mirrors the terms of the letter, specifically that he will be close by and that they will be reunited, whether she likes it or not.

Mrs. Drover then recalls how she responded to news of her fiancé's presumed death in the war: she handled the situation well, partly because she was relieved she would not have to marry him. Her family was also relieved, as they did not believe they were a good match. Being with him made her experience a "dislocation from everything" that stayed with her for some time and prevented her from attracting a husband until she was thirty-two. Then, having met her husband, she went on to live a quiet life that she struggles to believe has been observed by anyone.

Her relationship with her fiancé dealt a blow to her sense of self—even estranging herself from her own being for a time—and this prevented her from having meaningful relationships for some time afterwards. Notably, she was never unfaithful to her fiancé—she met her husband long after her fiancé disappeared. This defies the source of the story's title, an old ballad warning women that a demon would come if they were unfaithful while their husbands were away. Mrs. Drover was not *unfaithful, so this subtly suggests that whatever is haunting her is perhaps an undeserved punishment.*

Returned to the present moment, however, Mrs. Drover asserts that "dead or living the letter writer sent her only a threat." She finds it difficult to continue kneeling "with her back exposed to the empty room," so she moves to a chair where she can see the whole room before observing 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". **The house** now feels hollow enough to undo the years she has spent there with her family and any comfort she might draw from these memories. She notices the sounds of rain through the shut windows and, shutting her eyes, attempts to convince herself she has imagined **the letter**, but when she opens them still sees it lying on the bed.

The threat suggested by the letter and her traumatic memories of the past have contaminated the safety and comfort of the family home. Clearly, the past is not a refuge for her, and now she is terrified of the present—in her flashback, she looked forward to safety and refuge in the future, but she hasn't started to do that yet now. Instead, she chooses to try to pretend the letter isn't real thereby denuding the present of its threat. It doesn't work, though—the letter is still there, which suggests that the sender is indeed real.

Mrs. Drover refers to "the supernatural side" of the letter's appearance: how did it get into **the house**? How did the sender know she would be there? Putting these issues to the side, she is certain that regardless of how **the letter** appeared, she must immediately leave the house. She locks the bedroom door and begins considering her options. She is adamant not to leave the house without retrieving the items she came for, as to do so would let down her family and tarnish her dependability. She thinks of how she might order a taxi, but she realizes the telephone is cut off.

Mrs. Drover is unable to focus on one question at a time and unable to form a plan of action. She is torn between escaping the house and saving herself, and retrieving the items she came to collect for her family in order to preserve an image of herself as a reliable mother. If the letter's sender is real, then Mrs. Drover's behavior is rational, but it's possible that she is imagining this, which would make her locking the door, her inability to focus, and her panicked contemplation of an exit strategy incredibly bizarre.

Mrs. Drover continues to consider "The idea of flight," but cannot help but remember her former fiancé and his coldness toward her. Indeed, she remembers "with such dreadful acuteness" that "the twentyfive years since then dissolved like smoke" and she looks to her palm expecting to see the woundmade by her former fiancé's button still there. She also remembers how their relationship brought about the "complete suspension of *her* existence," and fears the past is now threatening her present-day role as a wife and mother. Despite these vivid recollections, she nonetheless remains adamant that she would not recognize her former fiancé if she saw him, and that "*Under no conditions* could she remember his face."

Her attempts at planning her escape are compromised as she is unable to focus on the present moment, continually confronted with visceral recollections from the past that seem to both overlap with and overwhelm the present. The strength of these recollections causes her to behave erratically and prevents her from rousing herself to action. It's ambiguous and also ominous that she notes that her fiancé's presence suspended her own existence—having a partner who destroys your sense of self is often a sign of abuse. Of course, there is some evidence that the demon lover exists only within herself, which could mean that when he appears within her, her normal personality recedes. That she has never seen his face would support this reading—after all, how do you get engaged to someone and never see their face?

Finally, Mrs. Drover decides that she will exit **the house** before "any clock struck what could be the hour" and find a taxi whose driver can help her retrieve her belongings. Imagining the solid presence of another human comforts her, and she unlocks the door and ventures to the top of the staircase. Here, she believes she feels a draft rising up from the basement, as though someone has just exited through a door or window from that part of the house. This further encourages her to leave.

Mrs. Drover is afraid the next hour will be the hour the letter refers to, and so it's becoming increasingly urgent to leave the house. Her belief that a draft from the basement signals the departure of an intruder could be true, or further evidence of her erratic behavior and unstable frame of mind (although the physicality of air being disturbed is one of the more tangible pieces of evidence for a physical presence in the house).

Mrs. Drover is then on the street, still struck by the desolation of the deserted neighborhoodarea. The immense silence there intimidates her, as it makes it impossible for her to move about unheard. She is also agitated by the "damaged stare" of the surrounding buildings and tries not to look over her shoulder. When she comes onto the square, she forces herself to walk calmly toward the taxi rank among people carrying on with their lives as normal, and she climbs into the taxi just as the clock strikes seven o'clock.

Readers do not see Mrs. Drover leave the house. Instead, Bowen moves the narrative directly to the silence of the street, and the repetition of the image of the damaged buildings creates a sense of foreboding that mirrors the atmosphere upon Mrs. Drover's arrival at the beginning of the story. It's ominous that, just as she gets into the taxi—the place she imagined would provide her safety—the clock strikes seven, signaling a possible moment when the demon lover could appear.

Overwhelmed with relief at having escaped, it takes Mrs. Drover some moments to realize the taxi is moving without her having given any instructions as to where she's going. She attempts to get the driver's attention, and he responds by abruptly braking the car and propelling her forward. He then turns around so that their faces are very close to one another. They "remained for an eternity eye to eye," and Mrs. Drover commences screaming. She continues to scream and beat on the windows of the taxi as it drives recklessly away, "accelerating without mercy… into the hinterland of deserted streets."

Judging from her extreme reaction, it seems plausible that she has recognized the driver as her former fiancé, now transformed into the demon lover. That Bowen says they stared at one another for "an eternity" suggests both the magnitude of Mrs. Drover's terror and also the complete suspension of time, perhaps even death. This is significant, since throughout the story Mrs. Drover has kept meticulous track of time—both the hour of the clock, and also she has attempted (not always successfully) to separate the terror of the past from the present, and then danger of the present from the presumed safety of the future. In "eternity," all of these concerns are unnecessary, which is part of the terror of the ending—Mrs. Drover's old concerns are moot, perhaps because her worst fears came true.

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