

"The Demon Lover": A Ghost Story or a Story of War?

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Abstract: *The phenomena of ghost are very controversial, and people have been fascinated with the idea of ghosts. Thanatology is the field of science which deals with the study of death, and research done in this field has broadened the understanding of death and ghosts. It is believed that people wanted their dead beloved to return from the world of the dead because of emotional attachments, and hence, the concept of ghosts emerged where the dead returns as a ghost. This paper will attempt to analyse Elizabeth Bowen's story 'The Demon Lover' in two contrasting ways: First, as a ghost story, and then not a ghost story, but as a literary device for something else other than and more than ghosts.*

Keywords: Ghost, Thanatology, Death, Emotions etc.

1. Introduction

The concept of ghosts is represented in the area of parapsychology, folklore analysis, mass media and popular culture. Ghosts are used in cinema, print media, music, television, recreation, etc., as surveyed and analysed in Keith Durkin's essay 'Death, Dying and the Dead in Popular Culture'. In literature, the genre of short stories has successfully developed this theme. Apart from extracting from readers such emotions as fear, curiosity and suspension, ghost stories bear certain social roles. We can always try to find out thereason for the return of the dead. As Charles Emmons states in his essay 'Ghosts: The Dead Among Us', it can involve unfulfilled social expectation, violet death and improper burial or positive attachments of the dead to the living. Every culture has a different notion of the ghost who return for different reasons. Few ghosts are believed to have returned from the dead world to take vengeance or punish others for betrayal, whereas there are other reasons where the ghost returns to help someone or due to love for their living family or friends. Sometimes people have been haunted by ghosts who act as agents of social control. There are many narratives in the literature that have used ghosts as their central theme. The Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen took Gothic literature and contributed it with a new form of post-World wars age. Although Bowen's short story "The Demon Lover" (1945), with its supernatural love, letters, haunting memories and the metaphors in the house, would be bound to be distinguished as Gothic. Even though there are various renditions of the story, the fundamental plot centres around a young lady who swore to love her young lover everlastingly and to wait for his return from the war. Be that as it may, when he is accounted for his death or missing, she meets and plans to wed another man.

2. Methodology

In Greek mythology, Thanatos was the personification of death and, therefore, the twin brother of Hypnos (sleep). The traditional Greek eventually came to use Thanatos as a generic word for 'death'. Thanatology could be a direct linguistic heir of the Greek term and was first documented in

English within the mid-1800. As a science, thanatology examines attitude toward death, the meaning and behaviour of bereavement and grief, and other matters.

3. Critical Evaluation

'The Demon Lover' by the Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen can be interpreted as a ghost story where the ghost acts as an agent of social control who wants to punish his deceitful lover. The story is about Mrs Kathleen Drover, who comes to her shut-up house in London in the month of August after many years to take away a few necessary things. The writer provides great details of the house to create the effect of ghost stories such as broken chimneys, the presence of a cat, an unused piano, bruise in the wallpaper, claw marks on the piano, the dark staircase and the door and windows which stood again. Later, Mrs Drover finds a letter that creates queerness in the story. The letter thickens the suspense of the story as to how the letter gets into the house. It was evident that the letter was written by her dead fiance, who is assumed to be dead in the war which he goes to fight as a soldier. The letter brings the fearful memories of her dead fiance. The letter reveals that they both had made a promise of living together, but due to the fiance's death, Mrs Drover was unable to keep up the promise and gets married to William Drover. The fiance had made her promise to wait for him when he goes to fight in the war. The dead fiance has returned as he wanted to keep up the promise of meeting Mrs Drover at an hour which they had decided upon many years ago. Mrs Drover dreads confronting the ghost of her dead fiance. She had always associated her fiance with fear and cruelty. Mrs Drover could never get rid of her fiance's possessive passion towards her and fears that he will return to possess her again:

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 ... You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged. 663)

Kathleen behaved well when, some months later, her fiance' was reported missing, presumed killed. Her family not only

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supported her but were able to praise her courage without stint because they could not regret ... the man they knew almost nothing about. (664)

Bowen successfully created a perfect climax for the story where Mrs Drover tries to escape from the house due to the fear of the possible return of her dead fiance as a ghost. She tries to flee from the home in a taxi. She finds a taxi at the end of the story but realises that the taxi driver is the ghost of her dead fiance who wants to take her away with him. She comes eye to eye contact with the driver when he puts a brake, and she recognises him by his eyes:

Mrs Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream. After that, she continued to scream freely and to beat with her gloved hands on the glass all round as the taxi, accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets (666).

Her 'Demon Lover' returns in the form of a taxi driver and take away Mrs Drover to deserted streets in the speeding car. This way, the story invokes fear in the readers when the ghost appears in the end. The ghost story's necessary aspect is presented in the description of the house and the weather, which was very dark and gloomy. The weather also plays a vital role in adding to the effect of the ghost story. Bowen gives the supernatural being the role of an agent of social control as it returns from the world of the dead, mainly to punish the unfaithful lover who breaks the promise and moves on by marrying someone after his death. The ghost comes to remind Mrs Drover of her breaking the promise, which adds up her guilt.

Another way of interpreting the story is to look at it from its perspective being a war story. The many references to the world wars make it possible for the story. The war controlled many people's lives, and Mrs Drover suffers emotionally and physically due to the wars. She loses her cruel fiance in the First World War. The bombs of World War One ruined her shut-up house in London. Mrs Drover is never free from the haunting memories of the war. She gets married to William Drover to start her life afresh but very soon, her married house is also ruined due to the bombs of World War Two. Her constant feeling that someone is watching her could refer to the interference of the government bodies. The physical force and cruelty of the fiance allegory the two World Wars' effect, which destroyed many people's lives. The First World War has not been effectively resolved from the world's awareness, and the Second World War was bound to happen.

4. Conclusion

'The Demon Lover' can be interpreted differently based on the readers' understanding of the story. The most important interpretation of the story is that it is a vague story. The underlying meaning of the story can be considered a war story, where Mrs Drover is shown as a person who has suffered from the two World Wars which created mass destruction to the lives and properties of people in the history of mankind. Another interpretation of the story is that it is a very unusual love story of a couple during World

War One, which becomes a horrific story related to the breaking of a promise to one's lover. Mrs Drover associated with her fiance only through the physical pain, which caused her not through love.

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