A more sinister troth: Elizabeth Bowen's The Demon Lover as allegory

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Abstract:
Elizabeth Bowen's short story 'The Demon Lover' is a horror story which allegorizes the terror of war. The story of a married woman terrorized by her fiancee, 25 years after his death in World War I, has largely been interpreted as a traditional ghost-story. There have been readings of it as a tale of psychological delusion. The story was written in the middle of World War II at a time when many Britons were seeing the horrifying pattern of war and violence. Bowen's ghost was the memory of World War I which haunted people with the progressive intensifying of World War II.

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SOURCE: "A More Sinister Troth: Elizabeth Bowen's The Demon Lover as Allegory," in Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 31, No. 1, Winter, 1994, pp. 91-97. In the following essay, Calder explores "The Demon Lover" as allegory. Of all of Elizabeth Bowen's short stories, none has been anthologized as often as "The Demon Lover." First published in The Listener in November 1941 and reprinted in The Demon Lover and Other Stories (1945) and Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories (1946), it is usually introduced as a clever tale of occult possession. Bowen manages to highlight just how anxious, frightened and angry Kathleen is. A man who she would not recognise is staking a claim to her heart without her permission. Based solely on Kathleen's naivety or innocence when she was younger. Even if she is married and has children. He is sure to resurface at another time and bring further disruption to Kathleen's life. Something that Kathleen may be fully conscious of as she is sitting in the taxi cab. Despite the passing of time Kathleen knows that she will not be able to forget about K. or what she has promised him. In reality Kathleen is left facing a very real and personal war. Cite Post. McManus, Dermot. "The Demon Lover by Elizabeth Bowen." The Sitting Bee. The Sitting Bee, 4 May. 7 Analogous to Elizabeth Bowen's many other "strange and somewhat eldritch protagonists," Mrs. Kathleen Drover is tormented by inner contradictions; she seems almost to "come in and out of focus" as the tale progresses, like some figure carved "in a bas relief" (Osborn 191). Always "elegant and civilized" (Wilson 8),
she carries herself like a proper lady at all times. Calder, Robert L. “‘A More Sinister Troth’: Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘The Demon Lover’ As Allegory.” Studies in Short Fiction 31.1 (1994): 91-97. Print. Elizabeth Bowen. Toward the end of her day in London Mrs. Drover went round to her shut-up house to look for several things she wanted to take away. Some belonged to herself, some to her family, who were by now used to their country life. No other way of having given herself could have made her feel so apart, lost and forsworn. She could not have plighted a more sinister troth. Kathleen behaved well when, some months later, her fiancé was reported missing, presumed killed. Her family not only supported her but were able to praise her courage without stint because they could not regret, as a husband for her, the man they knew almost nothing about.