

The Non-human, Haunting and the question of ‘Excess’ in Elizabeth Bowen’s “The Demon Lover”¹

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Exploring the possibilities of thinking about matter beyond the human being, engages one with questions of embodiment and alterity. The posthumanist discourse aids in examining the ambiguous relation between the human and the non-human, and it allows for a subjective understanding of experiences beyond “embodied” existence while attempting to redefine systems, opening up possibilities for “disembodied” entities (Braidotti and Hlavajova 358, 359, 439). In some of her early works, Braidotti emphasized the necessity of rethinking the conceptual boundaries between human and non-human through which the thinking of life was shaped for many generations (Braidotti 2010). That is where she had called for the necessity of examining the diverse bioethical concerns haunting our imaginations of life, and therefore calling for an urgency to explore newer ways of thinking death and dying (Ibid). In her later book *The Posthuman* (2013), Braidotti elaborates on such necessity and gives these concerns a deep philosophical grounding, showing how they had haunted existing philosophical conceptualizations of life and death for many generations and why they need to be thought from fresh perspectives. Focusing on Braidotti’s views, this paper will show how the figure of a non-human, more specifically a ghost, highlights the idea of semantic and ontological undecidability, by being a figure that is neither present nor absent, neither alive nor dead. The ghost or the haunting figure is disturbing because, while it takes a human form, it is not alive, and in this sense can be called ‘posthuman’ too. In other words, it is thus almost human, but not quite. This problematizes the idea of haunting and any attempt at understanding it through human recognition. This recognition most often happens through encounters with memory and history, where the subjective experiences are shown in excess, in various literary texts. The objective of this paper is to examine how Bowen’s style and ways of describing encounters,

memories and objects enable generating such concerns of excesses and experimentations located within literary language while attempting to rethink our understanding of the non-human. Such a reading, therefore, aims at generating the diffracting patterns of reading together Bowen and new materialism so as to realize what each can offer for the other in realizing both from newer perspectives.

To explore such concerns of haunting and excess within literary language that forces us to reconsider our established assumptions about life and death, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, this paper will situate its arguments through a new materialist reading of Elizabeth Bowen's short story 'The Demon Lover'. This story will exemplify new ways of "thinking about matter" and "processes of materialization" as well as enhance our understanding of the "boundary between life and death" (Coole and Frost 2010, 5). In several short fictions of Bowen, we do not necessarily find the portrayal of a visible spectral figure or a ghost. More often, what gets dramatized, is the idea of haunting and the feelings of uncertainty, uneasiness, fear of the seemingly unknown, and dread of something spectral and enigmatic. The ghostly, the haunting, and the irrational are shown through the excess of hallucinations, anxieties, memories, and histories of the fictional characters, that are overwhelmed, crippled, and marginalized by terror, trauma, and alienation. The 'self', in these texts, gains access to the 'other' from a consciousness that functions ambivalently from the thresholds of intermediary moments and environment of the *phantasm*. As a result, the reader encounters certain liminal identities that are marked by differences and marginalizations, which destabilize the anthropocentric cultural assumptions of 'selfhood'. Borrowing ideas from Rosi Braidotti's posthuman theory on death and life beyond self, along with a brief engagement in the later sections with Jane Bennett's views on the agential potential of objects (or what she calls 'vibrancy' of matter), this analysis, therefore, intends to highlight the interconnectedness of the (human) self and the (not-so-human) other.

According to posthuman thinking, our idea of being human can no longer be considered “either the origin or the end of thought” (Bradotti and Hlavajova 357). Within our acts of conceptualization, the line between human and non-human cannot be drawn definitively as both are products of the process of continuous becoming. The thinking of the human has always been conceptualized through a tendency to separate itself from the non-human, and that needs rethinking now. Ontologically, while the non-human does not need human expectations or intentions to act, the notion of non-human agency is important because it goes beyond the “limited notions of subjectivity and power” within the province of rational human agency (293). The non-human agency becomes a requirement for the articulation of the “uncertain becomings” and thus a more inclusive framework becomes necessary for collaboration of the human and the non-human activities (293). The quest to “recognize the many other-than-human agencies that intra-act in our becoming- with(in) the world” is an important step for designing a more open approach towards a possible future (294). In the sections that follow, I attempt to show how a close reading of Elizabeth Bowen’s short story, ‘The Demon Lover’ exemplifies such new materialist notions of openness and collaboration between the human and non-human agency. This diffractive reading will lead to a realization of how Bowen and new materialism intra-act, inform each other, and what patterns emerge out of this reading. This will demonstrate how a dialogue opens up between Bowen and new materialism, that connects the notions of self and the other, life and death, human and the non-human/object while simultaneously enabling us to re-situate Bowen in newer posthumanist ways of thinking human-nonhuman entanglements.

The story ‘The Demon Lover,’ is set in London during the second world war. In the story, Mrs. Kathleen Drover visits her “shut-up house” in London at the “quite arboreal part of Kensington” to collect some things (Bowen, *Collected Stories* 661, 664). Here she encounters a letter from her presumed dead fiancé. Several unusual events follow but one cannot

distinguish between what really happens and what Mrs. Drover is imagining. No explanation is provided about how the letter appeared in the house. Mrs. Drover identifies the letter to be from her ex-fiancé reminding her of a promise to meet him at “an hour arranged” (662). Mrs. Drover does remember her past encounter with her fiancé but fails to remember his face. Yet she recognizes the taxi driver at the end of the story to be her fiancé, back from the dead, who “accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets” (666). Here Bowen produces a sense of undecidability in the story’s structure itself, and also shows the treacherous nature of memory. Whether the taxi driver is the dead fiancé or where he is taking her remains undecided in the story. However, the empty house on the deserted streets of a post-war city acts as a vessel where Mrs. Drover’s identity is challenged by the surrounding silence. Her weakening memory initiates her nervous breakdown, as she desperately tries to avoid “the demon lover”. Ironically, Mrs. Drover thinks that the taxi is a safer place than her house: “At the thought of the taxi her heart went up and her normal breathing resumed” and the “idea of the taxi driver made her decisive, bold” (665). In this story, Bowen shows that no place could be ‘safe’ during the war, a theme that she explores further in her wartime novel, *The Heat of the Day*. Her fiction examines “how world-historical events penetrate the shadows of private life, transforming the ways that people talk, shop, move, dress, work, love, and kill” (Ellmann 5). The concept of demon-lover too remains complicated since it continuously challenges our ways of constituting/identifying the ‘demon’ or ‘ghost’ in a purely negative, threatening image of not-human and reminds us of the deeply embodied humanist tradition and its emphasis on certain specific ways of conceptualizing the human or as Braidotti calls ‘all too human’. Therefore, Bowen’s style of describing the ‘demon-lover’ continuously puzzles us to locate such boundaries of human/nonhuman within any specific framework.

Bowen’s use of space/place too play a crucial agential role in shaping human actions and identifications of one’s sense of self. The issues of betrayal in Bowen’s wartime works are

directly explored through a relating of how loss of place determines one's sense of loss of self: "What has always ominously characterized her treatment of place is the loss of self. When places cease to function properly, their inhabitants lose selfhood, and are doubly 'disinherited'" (Lee 158). Bowen's feelings of being disinherited and betrayed were due to the rapid spatial changes around her during the war. The same thing can be located in the case of Mrs. Drover in 'The Demon Lover.' Here, Bowen's projection of the empty house in London after the blitz attains a phantasmagorical quality and makes the protagonist of the story suffer a traumatic recognition of her past. Here the space, location, and structure function as an agentic vessel or bearer of memory and history, where an obscure and phantasmic 'other', the demon lover, is created that is traumatically recognized by the 'self'. The 'self' does not remain steady, and its continuous shift through memories and histories in the form of hallucinations, visions, and reveries, opens up the channels of communications with the 'other,' helping it to appear and reappear. The non-human 'other' that the human 'self' encounters here is a condition of traumatic recognition: ambiguously they remain simultaneously in an embrace with each other and yet always separate, at the same time created through the same self and yet not. The idea of the human that has generally been considered as separated from the non-human, can be seen as not so separated anymore. Instead, we can see that the process of becoming for both the human and the non-human ultimately led to the recognition, a familiarity that had long been defamiliarized by the imposed cultural notions of the 'self.' Hence this recognition is traumatic.

In the chapter on 'Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self,' in *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti writes that the cultural logic of universal humanism is driven by "the dialectics of self and other," and "the binary logic of identity and otherness," as per the Eurocentric paradigm (15). Here subjectivity is equated with consciousness and universal rationality, whereas "Otherness" is defined as a negative and "specular counterpart" (15). According to Braidotti, this restricted notion can be challenged by a posthumanist approach that aids one to think about

life beyond the (human)self. Contemplating along these lines, in the context of this paper, thinking about life beyond the self is perceived as a form of thinking about the non-human that though emanates from human conceptualization and yet is not centred exhaustively upon the human. The notion of subjectivity has remained for many generations limited within the rational human agency. The non-human agency aids in overcoming that limit. Through the agency of the non-human, the uncertain elements of subjectivity get a channel to be articulated in a manner that is comprehensible *within* the periphery of human rationality. Turning towards the story 'The Demon Lover', I submit that such search for a non-human agency, that can interact and collaborate with human agency and subjectivity, finds an expression within the volatilities of literary language. Here, Bowen reworks 'The Demon Lover' motif of a popular English ballad. An American variant of this ballad is "The House Carpenter" (Reed 21). In the English ballad, "a spirit or ... a revenant lover destroys his former mistress through supernatural means as revenge for her unfaithfulness to him while he has been away" (Reed 2). Both the British and the American versions tell stories of women being persuaded by vengeful lovers from their past to leave their homes and families and "to travel to unknown places" (Reed 22). One is also reminded of the image of a woman wailing for her demon-lover from S. T. Coleridge's dream poem "Kubla Khan".

Literary critics differ in their analysis of this story. It depicts "a modern tale of aggression and victimization" set against the backdrop of the second world war (Reed 87). On one level, it can be read as a ghost story or suspense story that builds up like an Alfred Hitchcock film (Austin 117). On another level, it can be interpreted as "a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war" (Hughes 411). Another trend of analysis projects the lover in Bowen's story as "a psychopath, not a devil" who has come to claim his victim (Fraustino 486). The protagonist may also represent those who "stayed at home and betrayed the generation of young men doomed in the

previous war,” where the horror of the lost lover is embedded in her “suppressed rejection of him” at the very moment of his departure for the first world war (Morris 118). All these approaches presuppose the subjectivity and the ‘self’ in the protagonist, and thus remain concerned with the human agency only, prioritizing her actions and emotions, showing her as a victim. In this story, there is “nothing sensitive or kind about the soldier” and remarkably, he is “in no way individualized”, and also, we are given “the barest of details, not about his features, but about his uniform, and his face remains hidden by the darkness” (Calder 94). This lack of identity and Bowen’s description of Mrs. Drover’s inability to remember his face, make the non-human ‘other’ or the lover attain the ferocious, demonic, vindictive, and thus negative qualities that the ‘self’ wants to reject and negate, and eventually run away from it. Then how does the traumatic recognition happen? Why is this recognition important and what does it indicate?

Sigmund Freud’s thoughts can offer one way of understanding this recognition. In his essay ‘The Uncanny,’ Freud uses the German word ‘*unheimlich*’ which means ‘unhomely’ and is translated into English as ‘uncanny’ (Freud 193). According to him, the uncanny is not just a feeling of the mysterious or weird, but also something strangely familiar and yet unhomely. The elements of the ‘uncanny’, as defined by Freud, can be traced from the very beginning of ‘The Demon Lover.’ The location of Mrs. Drover’s house is described in terms of a strange recognition: “In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up” (661). The once inhabited house now seems to resist any intrusion as Mrs. Drover has to force round the latchkey “in an unwilling lock” and push the door “with her knee” (661). A sense of death, decay, and desolation that loomed around the house in the bombed city is described through images such as “no human eye watched Mrs. Drover’s return” or “Dead air came out to meet her as she went in” (661). The familiar setting of the house in which Mrs. Drover has spent several years of her life appears strange as she enters the house. She feels

perplexed as “the traces of her long former habit of life” are only reduced to minor stains as most of the furniture has been moved (661). After her marriage to William Drover, they settled down in this house, where “the years piled up, her children were born and they all lived till they were driven out by the bombs of the next war” (664). The “cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing” perhaps symbolize the fractured state of the identities who have been overwhelmed by the massive explosions during the war (661). The events in the story are organized like a “dream structure” (Wallace 59). Mrs. Drover’s past lover, the soldier, represents a connecting link between the two devastating world wars. Perhaps the repressed fear from the First World War manifests into a spectral shape in the form of the missing or the dead soldier during the Second World War. Since this lover, the soldier comes back from the first world war during the second world war, the story exhibits “a historical and cultural resonance beyond Mrs. Drover’s psychosexual being”: he represents “the culturally repressed which returns, with extreme violence, bringing death once more in its wake; he is the unexorcised and unassimilated other” (Corcoran 164). As Phyllis Lassner contends, this ghost is perhaps not terrorizing the woman because she fails to “fill the emptiness in his life,” but he is himself terrorized “by historical forces he cannot redirect, much less understand,” and thus he “imposes a promise on his fiancée that will provide the one stabilizing element in his life and death” (Lassner 66).

Mrs. Drover, like Bowen, has lived through both world wars. The terror and anxiety from the First World War undergo a repetition on a much larger scale during the Second World War, creating a doubling effect on both the author and her character. Mrs. Drover’s choice of the date for coming to the house (late August of 1941) coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day when she had parted with her lover in August 1916 (661, 663). Is this a coincidence, or a repressed desire to fulfil the “unnatural promise” that she had made as a young girl? (663) It is possible that the appearance of the lover as the taxi driver is a figment

of her imagination. Perhaps she is kidnapped by some criminal but she thinks that it is her lover who is back from the dead. Incidentally, her first name is Kathleen, and the letter from her lover is also signed by only the alphabet 'K' (662). This indicates an interesting take on the idea of the double. As Freud asserts in his essay, 'The Uncanny,' the 'double' was "originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego" and this "invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams" (210). One cannot ignore the probability that Mrs. Drover may have imagined the letter or may have dreamt about it. The letter denotes a sense of betrayal because she did not wait for her lover and got married to someone else. Does that signify a pang of repressed guilt in her? Mrs. Drover experiences a feeling of almost being out of her own body. This division or replication of identity, in the story, is shown through the images in the mirrors, as if Mrs. Drover, in a feeble manner, attempts to preserve her identity by replicating it in the mirror:

Mrs. Drover looked for the date: it was today's. She dropped the letter on to the bed-springs, then picked it up to see the writing again—her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white. 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 forty-four, with eyes starting out under a hat-brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down. (662)

Bowen's writing is suffused with forces of "dissolution and mourning": they suggest that while we are far too quick to "assume that people are alive," they also trace "the profound but shifting ways in which the living are affected by the dead" (Bennett and Royle xviii). However, what enables the simultaneous functioning of all these diverse interpretations of the text as well as hosting Mrs. Drover's own various struggles of situating herself into the embodied frameworks of rationalizing life/death is the excess/fluidity of meanings Bowen's use of literary language

offers. Language here, therefore, operates as an actant or apparatus, echoing Barad's views on how the apparatus or tool of observation itself enables the entwining of matter and meaning.

The relationship between identity and memory in this story is that of violent and traumatic recognition, which Bowen describes as 'resistance' writing, in the Preface to *Ivy Gripped the Steps*, the American edition of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 97-98). Here Bowen mentions that during wartime, every man and woman had a passionate attachment to every object, image, place, love, or fragmentary memory that they could identify themselves with, and thus resisted the gradual loss of identity. The irrational terror that Mrs. Drover experiences has its roots in the house and the bombing, which creates a disturbing environment for her elemental fears to find an expression. The story charts the "revenge of rejected feelings;" of "sympathetic understanding of another's need;" of the "inner life of imagination;" of the "possibility of intense love" (Coates 309). She does not remember her fiancé's face but she remembers the physical pain he caused her in the past that seemed to be on the borderline of intense passion and violent possession:

The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face. It was dark; they were saying goodbye under a tree. 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, which he each time pressed, without very much kindness, and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform. That cut of the button on the palm of her hand was, principally what she was to carry away. (663)

Her memory of her fiancé's aggressive behaviour seems to bring her only torment and terror: "He was never kind to me, not really ... he was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well" (665). As a young girl, Mrs. Drover lacked assertiveness as she failed to clarify her fiancé's "unnatural promise" of life-long waiting. All she could say

was: “But that was—suppose you—I mean, suppose” (663). After twenty-five years, she still lacks that assertiveness, as she lets the ghost of her fiancé terrorize and capture her, mentally and perhaps physically too. This resonates with what Rosi Braidotti points out in her essay on “The Politics of ‘Life Itself’ and New Ways of Dying,” about limits as thresholds. It is challenging “to catch the wave of life’s intensities and ride it, exposing the boundaries or limits as we transgress them” because “it causes intense strain, psychic unrest, and nervous tension” (210). This increased intensity or acceleration, that facilitates the process of becoming, is what Mrs. Drover experiences, which opens up a channel for her as an embodied subject to interact with the disembodied other.

For Freud, the fear of death is always projected outward as something foreign to the subject. While Freud’s ideas indicate the return of the repressed through some sort of conflicting and shocking recognition, what Rosi Braidotti discusses in *The Posthuman* illuminates the possibility of a much more collaborative approach between the human and the non-human, where the uncertain becomings get a channel for articulation through the non-human agency, that opens up new ways of thinking about the human, the non-human and death. According to Braidotti’s posthuman theory, death is not only the “inhuman conceptual excess: the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear” but it is also “creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming” (Braidotti 131). While personal death is connected to the suppression of the individualized ego, as Braidotti contends, the impersonal death is beyond the ego—always ahead, marking the extreme threshold of powers of humans to become (131). Death as an event is always structured in our timelines and ever-present in our psychic spaces, and thus awareness of life as a transitory phase is a defining moment of our existence; our existence as humans is marked by the condition of the possibility of death, and the proximity to death is a relationship that requires endurance (132). Braidotti explains this death, which is the precondition of our existence, as impersonal. Death is an event

that has already taken place in our consciousness, and we all are synchronized with death (133). As Braidotti asserts, Posthuman vital materialism displaces the boundaries between the living and dying, and thus life encompasses death (134). Braidotti further proclaims that “self-styling one’s death is an act of affirmation” because it involves stages of progressive planning for the final act (135). Perhaps this is the only affirmative way to overcome the fear of death.

Death is not a pleasant or popular subject among humans. Normally humans avoid thinking about death even though they know that it is something from which no living being can escape. Anything related to death such as a murder, a suicide, a ghost or a possible haunting, always creates anxieties in the minds of people, which show sudden eruption and disruption of identities. The story discussed here shows death and abandonment as sources of anxiety that produce trauma and hallucinations. In ‘The Demon Lover’ the protagonist suffers from the primal fear of death. Mrs. Drover, like any rational human being, at first, tries to think logically about the presence of the letter in the house:

On the supernatural side of the letter’s entrance she was not permitting her mind to dwell. Who, in London, knew she meant to call at the house today? Evidently, however, this had been known. The caretaker, *had* he come back, had had no cause to expect her: he would have taken the letter in his pocket, to forward it, at his own time, through post. There was no other sign that the caretaker had been in—but, if not? Letters dropped in at doors of deserted houses do not fly or walk to tables in halls. They do not sit on the dust of empty tables with the air of certainty that they will be found. There is needed some human hand—but nobody but the caretaker had a key. Under circumstances she did not care to consider, a house can be entered without a key. It was possible that she was not alone now. She might be being waited for, downstairs. Waited for—until when? Until ‘the hour arranged.’ At least that was not six o’clock: six has struck. (664-65)

While Bowen's description here focuses on the rational human mind that is trying to make sense of an event, the letter here seems to acquire an agency of its own that directs the next course of action. It acts as, what Jane Bennett calls, "vibrant matter."

Humans tend to consider inanimate objects as the background of human action. According to Bennett, "human agency is itself an assemblage of human and non-human powers," and when humans act, they do not "exercise exclusively human capabilities" but express and engage in a variety of collaborations with objects; human activity is always "distributed across a range of diverse bodies" (Bennett 447-48). Our tendency to put inanimate objects at the background of our human action, and thus separating them as passive in contrast to humans being active agents, limits our sense of perception. In the context of the story discussed here, the letter, of course, did not arrive on its own at the table, but the way it directed the course of action for the human subject, makes one think about how it acquires power and ability to influence human action. While Mrs. Drover tries to find a rational explanation that the letter would need a human hand to be kept on the table, Bowen does not offer any explanation in the story regarding this, thus shifting the focus from human agency to the letter itself. Scholars like Elizabeth C. Inglesby look beyond the connection between Bowen's animation of objects and the human psyche. She points out that Bowen assigns a more subtle role to the objects in her stories: "that of inhabitants of another dimension of reality not dependent on humanity to lent its significance" (Inglesby 310). Examples of such objects and spaces are abundant in Bowen's stories, such as the house in 'The Shadowy Third,' the rose bush in 'Look at all those Roses,' the bath and the doors in 'The Cat Jumps,' the library in 'The Apple Tree,' the letter in 'The Demon Lover,' and many more. Bowen, in her stories, shows possibilities that objects and spaces can acquire energy and living attributes without the aid of any human being.

A sense of the living attribute that Bowen locates in the material world also gets reflected in the language that she uses to describe objects, for example, a machine such as the taxi. After contemplating on the letter and its possible ways of arrival, Mrs. Drover, tries to rationally formulate her next action—getting a taxi. Strangely, “only one taxi” seems to be “alertly waiting for her” at the otherwise busy corner (666). For a fleeting moment, the taxi seems to have a mind of its own, irrespective of the taxi driver, that not only waits alertly, but will soon “accelerating without mercy” carry her away in the deserted streets (666). When Mrs. Drover is settled inside the taxi, it is at this least expected moment that the unimaginable happens:

The driver braked to what was almost a stop, turned round and slid the glass panel back: the jolt of this flung Mrs. Drover forward till her face was almost into the glass. 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. (666)

The cruelty that Mrs. Drover had experienced from her lover at her young age gets repeated here as the driver’s abrupt braking almost makes her bump her head in the glass panel. Irrespective of who the driver is, Bowen gives the reader a glimpse of the upcoming violence, and the possibility of death that waits for the protagonist. The recognition that Mrs. Drover experiences so suddenly in the taxi is perhaps indicative of her final reality, that is, death. This recognition is shocking for her because she was desperately trying to escape from it, while in her consciousness perhaps she knew its inevitability.

The figure of phantom or ghost, in a story, can give a form to the moment’s undecidability. The non-human or a ghost, in its appearance, is not necessarily ambiguous. However, it highlights the idea of semantic and ontological undecidability by being a figure that is neither present nor absent, neither alive nor dead. The ghost or phantom or the haunting

figure is disturbing because, while it takes a human form, it is not alive. It is almost human but not quite. And yet it is disturbing because it is a figure of someone who is dead and so should not be able to appear, thereby continuously disrupting Mrs. Drover's attempts to assemble meanings/interpretations of her experiences in a rational way. It is also unsettling because it causes us to reflect on the fact that we too are mortal and will die someday. The taxi driver, in 'The Demon Lover,' can be either the man (or ghost) from Mrs. Drover's past or a hallucinatory image, superimposed on any taxi driver in a paranoid state of mind. Is the recognition real or imaginary? Even if the taxi driver is Mrs. Drover's past lover, that does not necessarily mean that he is a ghost, because "her fiancé was reported missing, presumed killed" (664). The "Demon" in the title of the story can be indicative of not just a ghostly or supernatural demon, but the demonic qualities of cruelty and aggressiveness that the lover possessed. The story generates suspense that is parallel to any other mystery, romance, or thriller, where, quite often, we see an old lover from the past come to disrupt the present life. What becomes significant in the story is the terror that Mrs. Drover experiences. What is Mrs. Drover afraid of? Is it confronting her old lover because she has failed to keep the unnatural promise, or is it the anticipated cruelty and possible death that the man may inflict on her? Of course, there is also the natural fear of the dead.

Braidotti's explications on death as an excess functioning beyond available humanistic, rational frameworks and offering new ways of thinking life and living, is something that gets highlighted through the excess of meanings Bowen's use of literary language offers: death as continuously slipping, exceeding the meaning-making frameworks within which Mrs. Drover or the reader tries to contain it. Humanism has offered either a limited view of death or has associated excessive negative connotations with it. Braidotti shows how we can think beyond these limited notions of death, by embracing death also as an integral part of the excess in life. This excess or fluidity can be located in Bowen's story as well that initiates a post humanist

dialogue here. Mrs. Drover's case is carefully built up by Bowen that exemplify the anguish experienced by the humans because they remain disconnected from the perception that death is their pre-existing condition. As an event, death has already taken place in the consciousness, and hence it needs to be embraced as a part of life. As Braidotti explains, what the humans truly yearn for is to disappear "by merging into this generative flow of becoming" and what humans truly desire is to "surrender the self," thus choosing their "own way of dying" to and as their self; this is a "moment of ascetic dissolution of the subject, the moment of its merging with the web of non-human forces" (Braidotti 136). Death is an excess in this sense, since it simultaneously is a part of life and living and yet exceeding it. Thus, death, as the inhuman within, marks the "becoming-imperceptible" of the subject which rests on the "disappearance of the individuated self" (137). Posthuman death theory shows that death is a part of the "cycles of becoming," a form of "interconnectedness" (137). The interconnectedness between the human and the non-human through the cycles of becoming contributes to a greater collaborative possibility.

Braidotti's ideas help to analyze Bowen's story from a new angle. The various tropes used by Bowen to explore aspects of otherness in her story are elements of reveries, hallucinations, memories, shadows, fantasies, fears, and images of ghosts amongst others, all of which are hosted through/within the volatile frameworks of literary language. These contribute to the production of uncanny and phantasmic effects. Along with that, they also serve the purpose of giving rhetorical force to narrative concerns with matters of individual apprehensions of the self and the other. They disturb for the reader, notions of culture and other broader notions of identity, often having to do with memory and history. The strange and disturbing events occurring in this story are not supported by rational explanations. Although certain events can be explained by stretching the rational, most supernatural and unnatural activities are left undecided for the reader. Answers in this story are left in a liminal uncertain

condition where the borders between two binaries are very thin. Bowen's terrorized, paranoid, frail, and traumatized female characters like Mrs. Drover, is trapped in this liminal position of meaning-making process. This transitional identity may not always complete the conversion, but show possibilities. What becomes more important in this story are the moments of crisis for the protagonist that arises from the awareness of spectral identity.

The shock that Mrs. Drover suffers at the end is a moment of crisis, that opens up the possibility of the interconnectedness between the self and the other, the human and the non-human. The shock is traumatic for her because all along, she had been trying to resist the flow of becoming. Throughout the story, Bowen describes her as an anxious and nervous person and also wraith-like with "white lips," "eyes starting out," with "intermittent muscular flicker to the left of her mouth" (Bowen 662-63). The entire experience of Mrs. Drover throughout the story leads to her process of becoming. The moment of recognition at the very end is her human 'self' uniting with the non-human 'other'. This union is traumatic for her because she does not realize that death is the precondition of the living's existence.

Note

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