

Fears of the Demon Lover:

Female Paranoia in the Demon Lover Stories by Elizabeth Bowen and Shirley Jackson

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This paper examines the concept of paranoia found in two short stories based on the same folk ballad of the demon lover. Some critics read Jackson's "The Daemon Lover" and Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover" as stories of paranoia, suggesting the strong connection between the fears of demon lovers and the typical paranoid delusions. However, a close examination of the concept of "female paranoia," referring to psychoanalytic studies as well as clinical literature, reveals the issues of interpretations involved not only in the diagnosing stage but also in the alleged patient's thinking process. "Female paranoia" manifests its symptoms when the alternative interpretations of their lovers' behaviors emerge, forcing the female characters to question heterosexual romance scenarios. I argue that the demon lover stories, a variation of erotomantic delusions, express a critique of the patriarchal society that exposes women to perpetual threats that are represented ambiguously in the form of demon lovers. Jackson's story in particular shows that fears of the demon lover, however supernatural he may appear to be, are in fact of this world. The seemingly strange world to which the demon lover takes the protagonist, the world of conspiracy, is nothing but her own everyday realities.

Key Words : Female Paranoia, The Demon Lover, Shirley Jackson, Elizabeth Bowen, folk ballads

Introduction

Shirley Jackson wrote a short story titled "The Daemon Lover" (1948), which has been taken as a little quirky story Jackson was an expert in. Across the Atlantic, less than ten years earlier, Elizabeth Bowen wrote a story also titled "The Demon Lover" (1941), based on the same traditional folk ballad as Jackson used, and today both stories are read by some critics as stories of paranoia. Although the extents of faithfulness to the original ballad differ, these readings suggest that the demon lover story represents a typical pattern of paranoid fantasies, thus, a universal horror story for women. I will discuss Bowen's "The Demon Lover" and Jackson's "The Daemon Lover," which is even more twisted and vicious than the original, to explore the figures of demon lovers as representing one of the essential fears of women in patriarchy to cause paranoid reactions—or, it is safer to say that the demon lover embodies such fundamental fears that they can be easily dismissed as "paranoia." Particularly in Jackson, the fears and threats of the demon

lover present themselves in a developed form that illuminates systematic controls of women. I will argue that those stories show a critique of the system in which women are exposed to the perpetual threats embodied by demon lovers.

Literary critics have often focused on paranoia in fiction, yet paranoia has been tied more often with certain fiction by male writers, as easily understood in the popular association of paranoia with men.¹ The most influential argument still today in understanding paranoid male writings is Sigmund Freud's study on Daniel Paul Schreber, which argues that paranoia is a defense against homosexuality. This paper, however, focuses on Freud's study on a nameless female paranoid patient to help understand the demon lover stories. In order to deepen the understanding on paranoia, I will also look into *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), so that clinical and objective views can balance the traditionally influential view of paranoia. Yet my final goal is, not a reexamination of the particular mental disorder itself, but to see the significance of the paranoid theme of the demon lover stories.

Paranoia and the Demon Lover Ballad

In one of the most comprehensive and recent studies on paranoia, Stanley Bone and John M. Oldham deplore the lack of theoretical development of paranoia and speculate that the reason is the pessimism about effectiveness of treatment (3). Naturally this field is still haunted by Freud's theory with the (uncanny) repetition of one old theme, an entangled drama of the Oedipal complex.² In *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* [Dementia Paranoides], Freud interprets Schreber's delusions of persecution about his psychiatrist, in which his psychiatrist is his "soul murderer," as Schreber reacting against his love for the psychiatrist—"I love him because I hate him." This struggle with the powerful male, normally the father—his psychiatrist in Schreber's case—is the familiar scenario of the Oedipal complex. Freud's theory of paranoia—defense against repressed homosexuality—has circulated in psychoanalysis and in other psychological studies.

Wide applications of Freud's study in literary criticism are a reasonable consequence considering the fact that Freud analyzed and "interpreted" Schreber's text. In reexamining his theory, I will not join "Freud bashers" to simply repudiate his homosexuality-paranoia theory. The fact that his study itself is originally an interpretation of a text suggests his "interpretation" can even be *re*interpreted, thus, his "interpretation" of the unnamed female paranoid can be reinterpreted. And his homosexuality-paranoia theory is not entirely without a merit. As Ronald K. Siegel points out, the stronger taboo on homosexuality in the Victorian attitudes triggered the paranoid mode in men (16) more easily back in Freud's time, and still does to a certain extent today, as frequent use of the clinical entity termed as "homosexual panic" indicates.³ Repressed homosexuality may lie at the bottom of some, if not all, paranoid cases.

The construction of Freud's theory of paranoia through interpretation of the text reflects one

of the characteristics of paranoia itself. This characteristic of the paranoid—picking up pieces of information to interpret and to form a story—is now the primal feature in one of the two disorders that belong to popular non-clinical ideas of paranoia, “paranoid personality disorder,” one of the personality disorders, in the *DSM*. The paranoid believes that there are “no accidents—that everything is connected, intended, and meaningful,” as Timothy Melley puts it. Therefore, Melley argues, a paranoid theory is similar to a brilliant theory, the only difference being the extent of its explanatory power (19). Siegel calls paranoia a “way of perceiving and feeling the world,” and thus, Freud offers a way to “perceive” the world of Schreber and the female paranoid. The paranoid resembles a theoretician who tries hard to understand the world with logic, as Freud himself reads the hidden meanings in Schreber’s text to understand his homosexuality.⁴

Another disorder in the *DSM* that falls in the popular category of paranoia is “delusional disorder” (which with the publication of *DSM-IV* loses its denomination as “paranoid”). Delusional disorder belongs to the group of “Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders,” which is marked with psychotic symptoms. The *DSM* lists five types of typical delusions: erotomanic (“loved at a distance”),⁵ grandiose (“unrecognized talent”), jealous (“unchaste spouse”), persecutory (“conspired against”), and somatic (“dysfunctional body part”). Although scholars argue variously about the essential trait of paranoid ideations, I consider it to be the patient’s sense of being mistreated, or of being the target of someone else’s malicious plots; in short, persecutions.

Deviated from this central idea of paranoia is the first one in the list, the erotomanic type, which I see as the basic pattern of the demon lover stories. While all the other delusions imagine hostile environments, the erotomanic delusion, on the other hand, leads a person to believe that he or she is loved by someone with whom he or she normally does not have a direct interaction. In a sense, the erotomanic delusion imagines a possibly better world than the one that really exists. In fact, as Harold P. Blum insists, “erotomania is the inverse of paranoia, in which erotic seduction defends against hate and rage” (108). However, the erotomanic plots can also lead to fears. Being loved by someone can be a nightmare when that particular someone forces his or her will onto him or her, or that particular someone’s affection takes an unwelcome turn.

The scenario of the lover turned sour fits the basic plot of the folk ballad of the demon lover. The demon lover ballad has numerous variations in Scotland, England, and also in North America, but according to Toni Reed in *Demon-Lovers and Their Victims in British Fiction*, its origin is found in the Scottish Border region. Although several variations exist, the basic plot of the popular ballads that are collected in Francis James Child’s *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* is the same: an old lover comes back to take revenge on his unfaithful lover. In most versions, the demon lover is a sailor, whose delayed return has caused irreparable damage to his relationship with his lover: his lover believes him dead and has married another man. One day the demon lover returns unexpectedly and seduces her to come with him, leaving behind her children and husband, to sail away with him to the land of wealth. When, away from the shore, she finds that he has cloven feet, the demon lover sinks his ship, revealing his intention of revenge. According

to Reed, “the ballad is a distilled version of a Gothic romance about obsessive love and hate, for the woman in the ballad is just as controlled, just as victimized as the terrified women” in Gothic novels (56). In the Gothic, the demon lover figure appears as the hero-villain, variously called as the descendant of Milton’s Satan, Byronic hero,⁶ or “homme fatal,”⁷ as a character who drives the story as a thriller as well as a romance.

Reed suggests two reasons for the proliferation of this demon lover story: one is people’s universal curiosity about the “danger of joining forces with the power of evil” and another is an incentive to have a “subtle means to control women” and to warn against transgressing the “accepted norms of society” (116). Reed’s interpretation locates the danger and lure of the demon lover outside the social norm; the demon lover must be avoided at all costs if one wants to lead a safe and normal life. However, the Gothic novels do not necessarily expel the villain out of this world. Heroines, especially of modern Gothic romances, cope with them not only by running away from them, but sometimes by reconciling with, or just understanding them. The demon lover is not one-dimensional pure evil.

Janice Radway, Tania Modleski and Joanna Russ analyze modern Gothic⁸ in order to understand this inexplicable attraction of the hero-villain. Russ, who calls the demon lover character the Super-Male (32), regards the heroine’s central action as consisting in her attempts at “reading” his expressions, and Radway, in her study that focuses on the ways in which female readers read modern romances, explains the reason why the heroine needs to “read” male characters. According to her, first, in patriarchal society, a woman has to attach herself to a male, who, unlike her, is allowed entry to the public realm. Second, because of their social condition, Radway argues that women encounter difficulty in reading and understanding men, who consciously express themselves in an unfeminine mode (or do not express themselves at all) (139).⁹ The principles of patriarchal society render the woman’s attempts at reading men’s behavior almost impossible but necessary because the man holds the key to the knowledge in the world and a woman needs access to it through him in order to survive. Thus, in romances, in order to reconcile with the fact that the heroine accepts the possibly dangerous demon lover, she deploys the strategies to tame his fearful sides by understanding supposedly the “true” nature of him. However, this “revelation” seems more like a rhetorical manipulation, because it consists of the heroine’s change of perception. The demon lover turns from a fearful lover to an affectionate one, just because the heroine finds his alleged “true” inner nature.

This argument on the significance of the demon lover ties this character with paranoia on the issue of interpretation. The demon lover has to be read and reread. As Modleski points out, the demon lover reflects the difficulty of reading for a woman, the difficulty of reading men’s “true” nature because of the different social codes men and women follow. However, the demon lover also hints at one curious and highly disturbing message: fearfulness in men, or even violence in men, may present itself attractive to women, which also means that his desirability for a woman may inherently involve unwanted aggressiveness. This demon lover story, especially in the original

plot and in many modern romances, at least connects the lover's attractiveness with his economic power, indicating his mysterious charm can simply be translated into financial stability. The demon lover involves so many ambivalences and ambiguities that reflect sociopolitical elements that women have to negotiate under the guise of romance. Therefore, the heroine has to face him like a paranoid, gathering pieces of information to understand the demon lover to form a love story after complicated negotiations and compromises. When she cannot, she is destined to follow either the fate of the protagonist in Bowen's story, or the one in Jackson's.

Bowen's "The Demon Lover"

The demon lover stories by Bowen and Jackson, although they both draw on the folk ballad of James Harris, are not normally read as cautionary tales, like the original folk ballad, partly because one cannot find fault with the protagonists. Instead, critics point out the possible paranoia of the main characters. Bowen's version of "The Demon Lover" follows the original plot more faithfully, except the setting, which is changed into London during WWII at the time of the Blitz. In the opening of the story, Mrs. Kathleen Drover checks around her house in London and finds the trace of intrusion before returning to her temporary house in the countryside, where she lives with her family. In the deserted house she finds a letter from her long lost lover, whom everybody believes to be dead in the last war. He writes that he will come and see her as he promised long time ago. When Kathleen gets in a cab to leave this ominous house, she finds him behind the wheel. He emerges as was promised, taking her away in a taxicab and "accelerating without mercy" to the "hinterland of deserted streets" (666). Many critics argue that the demon lover is a symbolic representation of war, because he comes back to haunt Kathleen during the wartime.¹⁰ Bowen uses the demon lover figure to depict the violent and changed atmospheres of London.

Although the overall tenor does not differ from other critics, Douglas A. Hughes claims that Mrs. Drover is paranoid delusional. His view is not the only or most accepted reading, but still Hughes confidently calls the reading of the story as a ghost story "misreading" and describes this short story as a "masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war" (411). Hughes reads the sign of Kathleen's derangement in her memory of the soldier lover, whom she remembers as detached and unpleasant. He takes it as an indication that she has blocked the true memory when Kathleen cannot remember her old lover's face, arguing that the lack of memory stems from her trauma of losing her lover in the last war. He even mentions in his note that Kathleen's negative memory of her lover comes out of her present state of mind, which is severely diseased.

However, Kathleen's memory does not give us any clue that suggests her falsification of the truth, although his delusional theory is worth examining. In the last meeting, her lover made the promise to be always with her and to come back to her, the promise that Hughes believes to be "common among young lovers" (412). Yet his promise left Kathleen confused and anxious because she was not convinced with his affection. She remembers:

···He was never kind to me, not really. I don't remember him kind at all. Mother said he never considered me. He was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well. What did he do, to make me promise like that? (665)

Though Hughes reads the “cold, ominous figure” as the result of her “diseased imagination,” this passage does not impress the reader that her trauma of the Great War has affected so much that she remembers her lover completely a different person. Kathleen describes an undeniably obsessive and persistent stalker, who somehow has succeeded in winning her over as his fiancée. She does not remember his face but she remembers her fears. She sensed his obsession with her so strongly that she keeps feeling his eyes everywhere she goes, on the face that she cannot even remember. Or, maybe she does not remember his face because she did not think that she was seeing his true face, vaguely sensing his hidden malice.

If her lover was in fact as evil as she remembers, Kathleen is not entirely paranoid for her concern about him. Yet this anxiety about one's own lover can easily be termed as “female paranoia,” —thus, dismissed—as Hughes' firm denial in accepting Kathleen's unpleasant memory of her lover indicates. Melley, examining Diane Johnson's *The Shadow Knows* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Women* and *Lady Oracle*, argues that the heroines' sense of being stalked or being loved by someone unknowingly suggests their paranoia, resulting from social control of women by way of internalized surveillance (107–32). He defines the delusion and fear of being stalked and watched as “female paranoia” and claims it as one major theme of modern female Gothic. Judith Halberstam also argues “female paranoia” in a similar vein, claiming the heroines of modern horror movies show cases of female paranoia. In her understanding of “female paranoia,” a woman's fear that someone is trying to harm her is a legitimate reaction to her environment. She claims:

We will note that while male paranoia seems to produce a fantastic tale very similar to the Gothic narratives we have been examining, the female paranoid tells a rather ordinary story about an all too realistic persecution that bears a great resemblance to some contemporary horror film with its insistence upon the terror produced by the unwanted monstrous gaze at the specifically female body. (*Skin Shows 109*)

Jonathan Markovitz even suggests female paranoia in the horror movie is a “reasonable response to a world that is hostile to women” and thus, the movies can offer “important critiques of existing power relationships” (219).

The critics of “female paranoia” in modern Gothic or horror films indeed argue that “female paranoia” is not paranoia. The alleged paranoid heroines of modern Gothic or horror films do not claim themselves to be victims without foundations: there do exist serial killers or monsters that try to kill the protagonists. The central plot of those stories revolves around how one character survives through repeated assaults and attacks. Therefore, Markovitz sees “female paranoia” in horror movies as a “survival skill.” Halberstam and Markovitz see that “female paranoia” in the

movies is the expression of the legitimate fears of the existing violence against women, and thus, not at all pathological. Joanna Russ, too, in discussing modern Gothic, claims that those novels describe “justified paranoia” (45). A woman develops the paranoid sensibility to defend herself in the society in which she is immersed in the controlling gazes of men. These characters are not delusional to believe that someone is stalking them.¹¹ Kathleen Drover may be experiencing a psychotic break when she finds herself alone with her old lover in the taxicab, but she may not. As a work of fiction, the nightmarish ending is naturally understood as a closure of a surreal story, because, as in many paranoid themed stories, delusional plotlines come true in fictional realities; in her case, she may be encountering her nightmare in her realities—to come face to face with her stalker.

“Female paranoia” stems from the fear of being loved in an undesirably way, or even, the fear of being desired but not loved. The true terror does not emerge until a woman starts rereading him. Kathleen Drover could not, and still cannot, trust her old fiancé’s love; she sensed something cold in him, yet she forced herself to believe him. She has been unsure about the old soldier’s love; she now looks back and reinterprets his attitude. If the fears that accompany her reinterpretation cause her paranoid delusions about the demon lover’s resurgence, the demon lover, whose true face is hard to see, is the trigger for paranoia. “Female paranoia” starts to show its symptoms when a woman finds hidden signs that warn her of her unconscious self-deceit in love and hate.

Jackson’s “The Daemon Lover”

Jackson’s protagonist is not threatened by the demon lover’s visit or his menacing presence. James Harris in “The Daemon Lover” is demonic in his disappearance. At first glance, Jackson’s short story seems to be telling the part that is missing from the folk ballad as a prequel. The story starts with the thirty-four-year-old woman waiting for James Harris, her lover, to come to her apartment at the appointed time on their wedding day. She waits and waits, and finally she wanders into town looking for him. When she starts her search, the reader learns that she barely knows him. She has never called him on the phone because he (allegedly) does not have a telephone, or she has never been to his apartment. The unnamed heroine asks people on the street questions about his whereabouts, enduring the embarrassment of disclosing her unstable relationship with her alleged fiancé. Finally when she arrives at an apartment with the pieces of information she has gathered, she hears some voice inside the room but nobody comes to the door. She comes back to the apartment again and again, just to knock on the door and wait. James Harris seems to appear and disappear at will, true to the name of the demon lover. He comes out to this world just to give her a temporary bliss so that he can bring her enduring agony and humiliation. She has to see herself self-consciously as a woman of thirty-four-year-old in an unfittingly girly dress, who is desperately chasing a man. The protagonist feels the cold and curious eyes that brand her as a failure and has to continue to live in the world full of cold strangers.

A paranoid reading of this story finds its most compelling evidence in the protagonist’s acute

sensibility of the eye on her and her persistent visits to his apartment. T.S. Joshi and Darryl Hattenhauer both imply that the woman suspects the people on the street are conspiring against her and giving her false information just to laugh at her, even though they know nothing about James Harris. The protagonist arguably shows an advanced case of “female paranoia,” which renders her hypersensitive to other people’s eyes.

The disappearance of the demon lover coincides with her realization of the unfriendly gazes of people around her on the street. When she cannot find him at the address she has thought as his, she stands on the sidewalk for so long, not knowing what to do next, that she hears some woman calling another person to “see” her (19). The delicatessen owner “inspect[s]” her with his eyes “narrow” (19). She cannot help but become conscious of others’ gazes, after the disappearance of the demon lover. She wonders how James Harris will like her dress or whether the print dress with the wide swinging skirt is appropriate for a woman in her thirties. When she gradually begins to think that he is not coming back to fulfill his promise to marry her, she becomes more conscious about people’s eyes on her. This is a story in which a woman witnesses her erotomaniac plot gradually disintegrating.

In a close analysis, the unnamed heroine bears a striking resemblance to Freud’s female paranoid patient in his analysis, “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytic Theory of the Disease.” She was a thirty-year-old woman in a relationship with a man whom she could not trust. Freud believes that Schreber’s homosexual attachment caused his paranoid delusions, so he managed to find the same pattern in the case in which the patient seemed “to be defending herself against love for a man by directly transforming the lover into a persecutor” (SE 14: 265). The patient believed that she had heard the noise of a camera when they were lying on his bed together, suspecting that he had arranged someone to take pictures of them together. Freud first wondered about the lack of the influence of a woman in this patient’s case, but he discovered one later. The patient told him that she was worried that her lover, who worked at the same office, might have told her female superior about their affair. According to Freud, the female superior was a substitute for her mother, and here is the familiar scenario: the paranoid tries to free herself from her attachment to her mother, who becomes the “hostile and malevolent watcher and persecutor” (SE 14: 268). What puzzled Freud first is that a “woman should protect herself against loving a man,” and thus, he theorized her “homosexual” attachment to her mother as her motive to deny her love for the man. The process of Freud’s reading is, without a doubt, a “reduction of the atypical female exception to the proto-typical masculine rule” and “normalization” of female sexuality to conform to the masculine model, as Naomi Schor claims (205). However, he mentions earlier that the patient, a thirty-year-old woman who lived with her mother and held a responsible post at her office, had at first refused the man’s advances because they could not marry for some unspecified “external reason.” The man did not give up but pursued her, insisting that they should not avoid what they both “longed for” and had an “indisputable right to enjoy” (SE 14: 264). Freud’s paper does not tell what exactly prevented them from marrying, but it is

not difficult to imagine that she had enough reason to suspect his sincerity and to worry about her reputation at the office as a woman in the early twentieth century. She gave in to his hedonistic way of life, which, we can guess, had not been precisely hers. This patient defended herself from loving the man not because of her “homosexual attachment” but because of the vulnerable position she was in. She had to protect herself from being humiliated and/or taken advantage of. All the episodes she told indicate her distrust in her lover, which she seemed not to notice herself. She defended herself from misinterpreting the man’s contempt or hatred for her as love. Her strong fear of degradation may have caused her to hear the sounds that did not exist. Her lover was a demon lover, to whom she was attracted but in whom she detected disingenuousness.

Freud’s reading of her case is normalization indeed; at the bottom of Freud’s reading is the same assumption as that of her frivolous lover that a woman appreciates a man’s sexual attention regardless of other obstacles. Freud ignores the patient’s legitimate concern that caused her hypersensitivity. In his reading, the patient “must” love the libertine without reserve, and when she does not, she “must” be hiding her homosexual tendency like Schreber was. His theory of paranoia presupposes a woman’s unquestioned participation in a patriarchal-heterosexual romance; otherwise she has hidden desires.

Unlike Freud’s patient, the protagonist of Jackson’s story is a willing participant in a heterosexual romance, yet like Freud’s patient, people’s eyes and words confirm her exclusion from the scenario. The townspeople she questions offer baseless reassurance about her lover, although her descriptions of James Harris throughout the story remain vague—she always describes him as a “rather tall man” in a blue suit: no mention of the color of his eyes or hair, or specific height, similar in the manner in which Kathleen cannot remember her demon lover’s face. The reader suspects that their responses are malicious, when one realizes that people answer with increased confidence as they speak. The florist the protagonist asks hesitates to answer first, then he becomes “almost certain,” then “sure,” and finally “absolutely” confident that James Harris bought one dozen chrysanthemums from him. The shoeshine man testifies that he saw a man on the way to see his girlfriend. People’s testimonies lead her to a certain house, as if they plotted in advance. With mounting expectation and anxieties, the protagonist asks a woman with a boy nearby, trying to identify the house her demon lover has gone in, and receives an ominous answer from the boy. The boy, again like all the other people she meets on the street, is confident that the man he saw is James Harris, and poses a question innocently, “You gonna divorce him?” (26). Before the protagonist says the words “I do,” or she even finds him, her fiancé turns into an unfaithful husband, ending the protagonist’s dream of becoming a bride.

This story can certainly be read as a delusion of the female protagonist, though one cannot determine where her delusion starts and where it ends. Unlike Hughes on Kathleen’s state of mind, Joshi ends his criticism with a suggestion that they might be an inexplicable conspiracy around the unnamed heroine: all the people just lie to torment her. This prospect is, according to Joshi, “more frightening” than the prospect that the whole story is the protagonist’s delusion. Joshi indicates

that people's enigmatic yet undeniable malice deserves more attention than a lonely thirty-four-year-old woman's seemingly harmless fantasy, because one can only find pure evil in their motivation to lie. I would also like to add one point to support the reading that there exists James Harris: her worries are amplified from the notion that he left her as soon as he had sex with her. In the morning she tries to "avoid thinking consciously of why she [is] changing the sheets" (10), suggesting their sexual encounter before the day he promised to marry her. As Freud's patient became hypersensitive in her lover's bedroom, their sexual relationship raises her sensitivity level. After all, delusions are hard to detect because most delusions follow likely scenarios that really do happen,¹² and this delusion/story is, as Halberstam describes the story of female paranoia, categorized as a "rather ordinary story about an all too realistic persecution," except for the demon lover's almost supernatural disappearance.

People's collective evil, or mob psychology, is one of Jackson's most known themes. Jackson's short story, "The Lottery," for which most people remember her name, depicts an inexplicable evil of the villagers, who yearly draw the lottery to find a sacrifice who will be stoned to death. This annual event can be a random process to find a scapegoat to let off steam to keep the peace in the community, yet some critic also finds particular reasons why Tessie, the victim, is chosen.¹³ Tessie may not be a random sacrifice but a carefully selected target.

The people that come in contact with the unnamed heroine may also have reasons, if not legitimate, for their malicious lies. The unnamed protagonist senses the mocking air of the people who talk to her. They change their responses and attitudes as conversations progress. Those people sense, mirror, and stir up the protagonist's anxieties. This also parallels Freud's patient's symptoms. Freud's patient projected her anxieties about her lover onto a hidden camera; the protagonist finds the confirmation of her lover's insincerity in people's eyes and words. As the uncertainty of her lover's sincerity causes great anxieties in Freud's patient, the unnamed protagonist's anxiety level rises as she searches for her fiancé all over the town and learns that her alleged fiancé leaves his old address without an advanced notice and goes to a new apartment with an armful of flowers with smile.

Like the woman in Freud's case, the unnamed heroine's uneasiness about how she is perceived by others mirrors her worries about the sincerity of her demon lover.¹⁴ James Harris's attention (or the lack thereof) makes the protagonist nervous, because his failure to fulfill his promise (the morning after she has fulfilled his desire) indicates the nature of his attention: fleeting and insincere. The doubts and fears that both the unnamed heroine and Freud's patient have of the others' gazes come from their doubts and fears of their lovers' attention. As a result, what she thinks of the man's attention—her primary concern—inflects what she thinks of the others' perspective on her and they reflect her anxieties back on her with their attitudes. The unnamed heroine tries to deny the new realization about her demon lover, but she cannot. She even starts wondering how to act if she sees him after all the trouble she goes through looking for him, because she becomes more and more unsure about who or what he is. As she comes to this dark

realization about her demon lover, she becomes conscious of how others perceive her. If there is an inexplicable malice, it floats in the air as a general consensus about a slighted woman.

Her search for her demon lover turns itself into a journey to learn how she is seen in the world. The gap between how the protagonist is seen and what she thinks she is widens, and she learns of the gap as she searches for her lost lover. She is eager to fill the gap, of course, although she can only do so by finding her demon lover. The unnamed heroine simulates in her mind what happens when she reports the demon lover missing to the police, and imagines how she would respond to policemen's silent but mocking attitudes:

“Yes, it looks silly, doesn't it, me all dressed up and trying to find the young man who promised to marry me, but what about all of it you don't know? I have more than this, more than you can see: talent, perhaps, and humor of a sort, and I'm a lady and I have pride and affection and delicacy and a certain clear view of life that might make a man satisfied and productive and happy; there's more than you think when you look at me.” (23)

These words suggest what she reads in others' eyes and what she fears. What others see in her, the unnamed heroine believes, does not represent what she really is. She is conscious of what the others see: a deranged and desperate woman who has an imaginary lover. She even tries to insist her value in domestic terms as a potential ideal wife. Met with cruel eyes, the unnamed heroine feels the urge to reaffirm herself by attempting to exhibit her capacity as a functioning and helpful woman. However, the demon lover defines her as a failure with his disappearance. As Joshi and Hattenhauer argue, she may be imagining everything in her mind—her demon lover and the promise of marriage—just to remind herself of her place in society, or how she is seen, “failure.”

The demon lover story, essentially an erotomaniac scenario, revolves around the fluctuating evaluations of a man. As I have argued above, the modern Gothic heroines succeed in ignoring the demonity of their lovers by almost purposely misinterpreting the lovers' behaviors. The protagonist in Jackson's “The Daemon Lover,” however, does not have that freedom. No matter how hard she tries to “read” his behavior, she fails to produce any positive meaning from his sudden and unexpected disappearance. Unlike other demon lovers, whose presences could be misinterpreted as signs of their strong attachment, his absence does not allow any space for interpretation. When even a stranger, to whom she asks his whereabouts, tells her that she “got the wrong guy” (15), she has to confront her former misinterpretation of the demon lover's attention in his absence. Because she has misinterpreted her demon lover, she does not understand the world anymore, as if the demon lover represented the whole world. She is thrown in to a vortex of fears once she sees her misinterpretation of the erotomaniac scenario.

The cruelest part of this story lies in that the heroine's agony does not end with the dissolution of her erotomaniac delusion. It continues, or rather starts with it. Her paranoiac world continues forever after her demon lover's malicious jilting. The forever absent demon lover, James Harris, turns everywhere she goes into a strange world. The streets are not the same. People look at her differently with knowing grin. She says to herself, “everyone thinks it's so funny,” and when

she is “suddenly horribly aware of her over-young print dress,” she pulls “her coat tighter around her neck,” so that she can hide her girly dress even more (23). She has to hide the trace of her expectation, the expectation to become someone different from what people see in her—an old maid. She is in the world in which she can no longer feel comfortable and safe. She is now in the world of conspiracy, in which people accuse her of failure, of being unloved. Like Kathleen Drover who senses danger everywhere as soon as the demon lover announces his arrival in the letter, the unnamed heroine in Jackson’s story starts sensing dangers and coldness upon his disappearance. That is why the protagonist has to come back to that mysterious apartment every evening, with expectations to get out of this world by going in, just to learn that she cannot enter the room. She stands in front of the boundaries that she can never go beyond. She comes back repeatedly in the mornings and in the evenings, before and after work, or on her way to dinner alone. The demon lover leaves her forever in the world of conspiracy, in the tedious repetition of routines, in which she is perpetually persecuted as a woman of thirty-four-year-old, unmarried, foolishly having dreamed of being loved.

As she walks down the street, the unnamed heroine of Jackson’s story steps further into a web of paranoid fears. The demon lover triggers female paranoia, a process in which a woman recognizes fears of patriarchy. In the traditional demon lover story, the demon lover himself threatens a woman as a force of patriarchy: a possessive and vindictive force that binds the freedom of women. Thus, her paranoia projects him everywhere around her and he becomes the eye to watch her to limit her freedom. On the other hand, in Jackson’s story, the demon lover guides the protagonist into a strange place, where he leaves her behind. The erotomantic story, a love story, is a crafty lie that he makes her believe. At the dissolution of her delusion, people point finger at her naïve gullibility. They make her feel that she is “too old,” she is too embarrassing, she is just not wanted, except for others’ malicious entertainment. Her nightmare is not a pure imagination, but a mere projection of the cruel realities. Once she realizes how she is vulnerable to others’ perception, she can never flee from the demon lover’s enduring persecution. The unnamed protagonist of “The Daemon Lover” stands in front of the closed door forever with longing, in a world of conspiracy.

Conclusion

The demon lover stories by Bowen and Jackson both share the same scenario of the erotomantic delusion, whether the protagonists are delusional or not. Using the term “female paranoia” involves a problem, because calling it “paranoia,” thus dismissing it as an unfounded crazy story, discredits a woman’s anxiety in the demon lover story. It could be even another layer of the manipulation in the society in which women are bound by complicated codes of behavior that force them to participate in heterosexual romances. The demon lover stories, as well as Freud’s study of female paranoia, show that when a woman is aware of a possible trap and is trying to avoid it, she risks being called a paranoid.

Examining these demon lover stories illuminates one of the prevailing fears of women. The demon lover is simply a harmful yet attractive man, but his danger and charm may both come from his desirability in patriarchal society: his economic or other powers that credit him as a “man,” which also allows his violence and arrogance. Although the demon lover story is a variation of love stories—sugarcoated ideology, which teach and circulate women’s codes of behavior and women’s proper desires—, it also allows a writer to express a woman’s fears and anxiety about the system itself, in which the demon lovers can disguise themselves—or can be accepted—as legitimate “masculine” objects of love. The demon lover story brings attention to these ambiguities of the love object.

One reason that the demon lover stories invite “paranoid” reading is that the primary issue involves interpretations of the ambiguous character. The word “interpretation” suggests that there are alternate interpretations and that the protagonists waver between conflicted views of the demon lovers. Female paranoid characters are showing different perceptions about realities than people around her. Kathleen Drover’s lover may have been a passionate man who simply died tragically in the war. James Harris may not have existed at all, because the unnamed heroine is not the type of person to have a fiancé. Paranoiac fears overwhelm the protagonists when the divergences of their interpretations from the popular ones surface.

The erotomaniac scenario qualifies the protagonists as paranoid, although both demon lover stories suggest the prevalence of the erotomaniac scenario in women’s lives. Freud’s theory of paranoid as a defense against homosexuality has some relevance in understanding the intensity of fears involved. The women with the demon lovers have strong enough fears and anxieties about their lovers’ sincerity. They may not only exhibit their symptoms as the delusional individuals only when they hear sounds that do not exist or see things that are not there. They suggest that mistaking her lover’s sincerity bring the same extent of humiliation as that of being known about one’s homosexuality for the Victorian men. These female characters may or may not be imagining the existence of their demon lovers, but they are delusional when they see love where it does not exist.

Two different endings of the demon lover stories by Jackson and Bowen show the two different endings to the erotomaniac plot. Bowen’s demon lover takes her away; he ultimately possesses her. Jackson’s demon lover leaves her alone; he ultimately abandons her. The men these women have believed loved them in fact do not, to the point that he physically hurts her, or to the point that he leaves her. These female characters at first both misunderstand their demon lovers, who turn out to be different from what the women have believed to be. The demon lover takes his love object, or his victim, to a faraway place. Each woman lives in a world where her own life is no more. The demon lover changes her world with his resurgence or his disappearance.

Jackson’s “The Daemon Lover” points to the source of fears—the system which puts a woman under strict surveillance to control her—more clearly by showing that the strange place the demon lover takes is in fact the place she has always been—the same town, the same streets, the same

apartment, just looking different. Her very environment, ordinary and realistic, becomes the world of conspiracy. Jackson's demon lover shows that the changed world has been always there and that her paranoiac fears are not of extraordinary or supernatural nature: they are of her own world into which she was born. Regardless of seeming freedom she has, Jackson's protagonist is trapped in a situation with no escape. She wanders around the town, goes to work and comes back home, and, leaving behind the delusion of being loved, feels the eye of persecution. She cannot run away from it unless the demon lover opens up the door for her. Until the demon lover lets her into his apartment, the protagonist has to suffer from her mistake in interpretation, and she will suffer forever. The demon lover comes out just to make her realize the world that persecutes her. Thus, this demon lover seems to possess supernatural powers in his ability to disappear completely and to haunt her forever, yet he could be just an ordinary man, who plays with the heart of the thirty-four-year-old woman in a girly dress. And he succeeds in throwing her into the world of paranoiac fears. James Harris terrorizes the unnamed heroine in his absence and controls her life with the web of fears that surround her, just by making her realize what kind of world she lives in.

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Notes

- 1 Don DeLillo, Philip K. Dick and Thomas Pynchon are often cited as the most important examples of writers who show paranoid tendencies in their fiction. Ronald K. Siegel also suggests Chekhov's *Ward Number Six*, Gogol's "The Diary of Madman," Shakespeare's *Othello* as fiction of paranoia (13). See also, for example, Steffen Hantke's *Conspiracy and Paranoia in Contemporary American Fiction*, Timothy Melley's *Empire of the Conspiracy*, and Patrick O'Donnell's *Latent Destinies*, and Mike Davis' *Reading the Text That Isn't There*. Also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coined the term "Paranoid Gothic" to refer to certain male Gothic novels in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.
- 2 One may wonder the lack of Lacan's name here. He rereads Schreber's case extensively in *The Book III* of the seminar and puts it as the foundation of his argument on psychoses. Lacan divides mental disorders into three categories—neurosis, perversion, and psychosis—characterized by their different relationships to the symbolic order. However, I will not discuss his theory here because the introduction of his theory, thus, of his terminology, only complicates my argument without benefits. My argument boils down to whether the demon lover "delusion" is in reality a mere delusion or not, as I argue in the text, so Lacan's argument, based on Freud's paper, focusing on the successful negation of the object of desire (Schreber's homosexual desire), does not hold relevance here.
- 3 As for the concept of "homosexual panic," see Martin Kantor, *Understanding Paranoia: A Guide for Professionals, Families, and Sufferers*, 122. This "condition" is often used as a legal defense; one of the recent high profile cases in which the defendant used "homosexual panic" is the case of the murder of Matthew Shepherd, in Laramie, Wyoming.
- 4 Kantor insists that this characteristic is so common that people with a "touch of paranoia" are seen everywhere. Interestingly, he includes literary critics among those who are in the gray area (71-72).
- 5 This name does not suggest the meanings popularly associated with the word, such as madness or melancholy caused by passionate love. On the contrary, the patients with this type have delusions of being

- the object of the other's desire and attention.
- 6 As early as in 1930, Mario Praz spent one chapter ("The Metamorphosis of Satan") discussing the origin and the applications of this character in the Gothic and Byron in *The Romantic Agony*. J.M.S. Tompkins also points out in her 1932's book *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* that the roots of Radcliffe's villains, such as Montoni and Schedoni, can be traced back to Milton's Satan (285).
 - 7 Anne Williams rephrased Mario Praz' naming of the hero-villain, the Fatal Man, and uses the "homme fatal," so that the parallel to the femme fatal becomes clearer in *Art of Darkness*.
 - 8 It should be noted in the research by Radway that female readers mostly do not like the novels in which the heroes show violent traits, especially sexual violence.
 - 9 Modleski sees at the bottom of the relationship between the heroine and the demon lover "women's fear of and confusion about masculine behavior in a world in which men learn to devalue women" (60).
 - 10 For example, Robert L. Calder provides a reading of this story as an allegory in which the demon lover appears as the metaphor of war violence in "A More Sinister Troth':Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover' as Allegory." Heather Bryant Jordan claims "war is personified as a powerful masculine figure capable of abducting the innocent woman made captive by memory and desire." Other readings also exist. Daniel V. Fraustino insists that the demon lover is a psychotic killer ("Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Demon Lover' : Psychosis or Seduction?"); and John Coates insists that this story is an "oblique but effective critique of English middle-class failure" from the 1920s to WWII ("The Moral Argument of Elizabeth Bowen's Ghost Stories").
 - 11 Clinical literature also shows that stalkers are more likely to be (heterosexual) men; thus, victims are more likely to be women. According to the *DSM-IV-TR*, individuals with erotomanic delusions, "particularly males, come into conflict with the law in their efforts to pursue the object of their delusion" (324-25). On the other hand, more women are diagnosed as the erotomanic delusional in clinical settings, according to the *DSM*. This suggests, despite the numbers of female sufferers of the erotomanic delusions, less women tend to act out their delusions. Interestingly, Siegel introduces as a case of the erotomanic delusion, a story of a female patient, who killed her object of love—who rejected her seduction after all the "signs" she picked because he was gay (113-139).
 - 12 The *DSM-IV TR* defines that delusional disorders are characterized by "non-bizarre" delusions, which means delusions with the contents that could happen in daily lives, while "bizarre" delusions, entirely implausible stories, are found in schizophrenic patients.
 - 13 One of the readings that suggest this lottery is in fact set up, or in other words, an election process, is presented in Peter Kosenko's "A Reading of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery.'" Some other critics also suggest similar interpretations.
 - 14 Lacan argues that the "other addressed in erotomania" is "such a neutralized other that he is inflated to the very dimensions of the world, since the universal interest attached to the adventure" (41-42). One can also argue that in Lacan's theory, the object of the erotomanic fantasy represents the whole world to the deluder. Although this argument fits the relationship between the unnamed heroine and James Harris in one sense, I am questioning here the possibility of the reversal: not the erotomanic object—the other—as a projection of the whole world, but the whole world as a projection of the demon lover.

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