Chapter 15

The Mother in Mourning: Women's Trauma and the Gothic Ghost in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*

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Abstract

Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983) reimagines the Gothic ghost story, transforming the traditional ghost into a contemporary symbol of female oppression, maternal grief, and haunting as resistance. In the novel, Jennet Humfrye, the "ghost mother" in black, emerges as a woman silenced by patriarchal norms, whose repressed suffering over the loss of her child returns in the form of ghostly revenge. Through the lens of trauma theory and feminist Gothic criticism, this chapter explores how Hill modernises the Gothic genre by combining psychological trauma with supernatural horror and creating a story where fear arises not only from the unknown but from emotional wounds that refuse to heal. As depicted in the narrative of Arthur Kipps and the oppressive setting of Eel Marsh House, the ghost's maternal grief becomes both her power and her curse, turning affection into monstrosity and sorrow into ghostly resistance. This analysis displays how the "ghost mother" functions as a voice for the silenced woman and as a metaphor for repressed trauma in contemporary society. The chapter also touches upon the concerns about motherhood, women's marginalisation, and the social pressures that continue to shape and intensify female suffering, showing how *The Woman in Black* still speaks to readers today as a powerful Gothic reflection on how trauma endures in both personal and collective memory.

Introduction

In her essay "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf reflects on the struggle to break free from societal expectations that silenced women, declaring that she had to kill the obedient 'Angel in the House,' who was

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repeatedly "creeping back" like a ghost until she finally vanished (1942, p. 237). The death of this ideal woman, constructed by the boundaries of patriarchal society, paved the way for women to redefine themselves as individuals capable of pursuing their own dreams, hopes, and desires. Yet, this long struggle for selfhood, rather than falsehood, has never been without pain. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000) demonstrate, women's repressed anger, creativity, and forbidden selfhood often led them to assume the role of the "madwoman in the attic," to make patriarchy "take seriously the struggle of authors or their characters toward self-sovereignty" (p. xxxviii). In this respect, such madwoman figures, like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, serve as metaphors for the hidden self that refuses silence even within the confines of the nineteenth-century novel.

The long history of women's struggle and survival finds a haunting reflection in the work of award-winning and best-selling English novelist Susan Hill, whose *The Woman in Black* revives the Gothic tradition as a contemporary ghost story in the late twentieth century. Hill, as a modern successor of the British Gothic, blends traditional ghost story conventions with psychological realism. The *Guardian* writer Rustin (2013) portrays Hill as "the author of the most celebrated ghost story of modern times" because *The Woman in Black* has achieved remarkable popular success, selling millions of copies worldwide, inspiring a long-running West End stage production, and being adapted into a major film starring Daniel Radcliffe in 2012. According to Rustin (2013), *The Woman in Black* has a strong sense of the uncanny, although Hill denies believing "in ghosts as such" (para. 10). Hill distinguishes between belief in ghosts as literal supernatural beings and her deep awareness of Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny as a psychological and emotional phenomenon rather than a physical one. In *The Uncanny*, Freud (1997) defines it as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (p. 195). The uncanny occurs when what should remain hidden or repressed suddenly reappears, blurring the line between the known and the unknown, and this is precisely what happens in Hill's novel, where buried memories, unresolved grief, and traumatic past events violently return to haunt both the characters and the reader.

The fear and disturbance come not from ghosts in Hill's fiction, but from the haunting return of what is repressed, such as memories, guilt, or grief. In an interview with Reynolds and Noakes, Hill expresses her frustration "when people call *The Woman in Black* a horror story," (2003, p. 31), insisting that it is chiefly a ghost story, even with its frightening elements. In

fact, she uses ghosts not to terrify, but to reveal emotional truth and human vulnerability. Her ghost stories are thus not about supernatural horror but about psychological haunting as the way past trauma and emotional pain continue to intrude upon the present. In *The Woman in Black*, the ghost of Jennet Humfrye is not only a spirit seeking revenge but the physical manifestation of suppressed sorrow and injustice, making Hill's sense of the uncanny an emotional rather than metaphysical experience. The familiar domestic world becomes terrifying because it presents what society tried to bury: a mother's grief, rage, and loss. In this regard, Hill's story clarifies that the scariest ghosts are not strangers from another world but reflections of our own buried emotions and unhealed past. This idea of haunting as Freud's "the return of the repressed" connects to Caruth's view of trauma, who describes it as "a wound inflicted . . . upon the mind" (1996, p. 3) that arises from an overwhelming experience not fully understood when it occurs, but grasped "only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (1995, p. 4). Moreover, as Leys (2000) suggests, "the experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (p. 2). In *The Woman in Black*, Jennet Humfrye's unresolved grief and rage over the loss of her child are never fully confronted but endlessly replayed through her haunting, turning her ghostly presence into the living repetition of a pain that time cannot heal.

In the novel, the ghostly figure of Jennet Humfrye represents the silenced woman whose pain has been ignored by society. Her story turns grief and anger into a lasting presence that refuses to fade away. Through Jennet's haunting, Hill gives voice to the emotional and social wounds women have carried for generations, indicating how trauma, when left unseen and unheard, can return in powerful and devastating ways. In this sense, *The Woman in Black* is not only a Gothic tale of fear but also a profound exploration of how women's suffering, silence, and strength continue to echo through time. Building on this, Gothic fiction more broadly reveals that the female self must tell her own story, challenging the patriarchal assumption of the universality of the male self; indeed, after the 1970s, it was increasingly recognised that "gender is crucial in Gothic" (Williams, 1995, p. 100). In her *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers accordingly coined the term 'Female Gothic' as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode" in Gothic literature (1976, p. 90). As Fitzgerald (2004) observes, Moers's coinage became "a pivotal moment in the timeline often drawn of twentieth-century Gothic criticism" (p. 8). Through the works of British female novelists such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë,

and Christina Rossetti, Moers illustrates how female fears, traumas, and anxieties are explored and expressed within the Female Gothic tradition.

The heart of the Female Gothic, as Wallace and Smith (2009) note in their discussion of Juliann Fleenor, lies in a deep uncertainty about female identity, particularly in "the conflict with the archaic all-powerful mother", a figure often imagined as a spectral presence or in the Gothic house itself (p. 3). This conflict, however, demonstrates women's struggle for selfhood within oppressive structures, as seen in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, in which female suffering manifests as ghostly vengeance. Jennet Humfrye, the ghost mother in black, embodies the trauma of her lost child and the haunting grief that consumes her. Socially condemned and deprived of her child, Jennet's pain becomes inescapable and repetitive through her supernatural return. Her haunting expresses what cannot be spoken within a patriarchal society that punishes female desire and motherhood beyond marriage. Through Arthur Kipps's encounter with her, the reader experiences not only fear but a deep empathy for her suffering: "I felt not fear, not horror, but an overwhelming grief and sadness, a sense of loss and bereavement, a distress mingled with utter despair" (Hill, 2012, p. 157). This proves how Hill's *The Woman in Black* locates horror not in violence but in the persistence of female sorrow, turning the ghost story into a powerful exploration of trauma and compassion. In this way, Jennet's haunting becomes both accusation and expression as a ghostly voice that speaks for the silenced mother.

Maternal Grief: The Ghost Mother as a Voice for the Silenced Woman

Jennet Eliza Humfrye's story as a denied mother is uncovered by the narrator Arthur Kipps when he decides to write his own ghost story to "finally be free of it" (Hill, 2012, p. 19). Arthur's narration of both his and Jennet's traumatic past also reflects Caruth's belief that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (1996, p. 58). As the surviving witness of the events at Eel Marsh House, Arthur remembers the ghost mother's fearful and recurring hauntings as a way to confront and release the story that continues to possess him. Through this act of testimony, Arthur mirrors Susan Hill herself, whom Reynolds and Noakes describe as "haunted by ghosts and characters whose stories she must tell in order to exorcise them" (2003, p. 7). In *The Woman in Black*, Arthur bears witness to "a true story, a story of haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy" (Hill, 2012, p. 18). Jennet Humfrye's haunting in the novel emerges from the trauma of motherhood denied, which involves preventing Jennet from fulfilling her role as a mother

and enforcing a violent separation that leaves deep wounds on her soul. Although Jennet initially refuses to give up her newborn child for adoption, saying repeatedly that they will "never be parted" (p. 139), she cannot resist the pressure and surrenders her son, Nathaniel, "to her sister, Alice Drablow ... because she'd no choice" (p. 183). Condemned by Victorian morality for bearing an illegitimate child, Jennet is forcibly separated from her own son and deprived of her maternal identity, dignity, and individuality, which silences her most essential human connection.

The ghost mother's first encounter with Arthur, who arrives in Crythin Gifford as a young lawyer to deal with Mrs Drablow's properties including Eel Marsh House, occurs at the funeral of Alice Drablow, where he notices a woman "dressed in deepest black, in the style of full mourning" and assumes "she was suffering from some terrible wasting disease" (p. 53). After the funeral, he even considers offering help "for the sick-looking woman" (p. 55) and escorting her safely, but she is nowhere to be found. When he later asks his companion, Mr Jerome, who manages Mrs Drablow's business affairs during her lifetime, about the woman's identity, he turns frozen with fear and claims to know nothing about her. Arthur finds himself questioning the woman's connection to Mrs Drablow and "what extremes of sad feeling she was now suffering, alone there" (p. 58). However, when he points out the woman in black to confirm her presence, Mr Jerome becomes so terrified that he holds Arthur's wrist "in an agonisingly tight grip" (p. 58). Mr Jerome hints that Arthur would be far safer in Crythin Gifford than at the Eel Marsh House and informs him that Mr Keckwick will accompany him on his necessary visits there. Moreover, at lunch, a local farmer warns Arthur that nobody, including the wealthy landowner Mr Sam Daily, would be bold enough to purchase Mrs Drablow's estate, leading Arthur to interpret that the town is governed by fear and superstition.

Arthur's indifference to the anxieties of the townspeople makes him stay in the late Mrs. Drablow's isolated estate, Eel Marsh House, located at the end of the Nine Lives Causeway, a path that becomes impassable after certain hours, in order to sort through her papers. Upon Mr Keckwick's departure, Arthur wanders outside the house and admires the beauty and quietness of the surrounding nature. However, his calm is suddenly broken when he sees "the woman with the wasted face" (p. 74) again in the ruined graveyard near the house. Jennet Humfrye's haunting signals her transformation from a woman confined within Eel Marsh House into a homeless, ghostly feminine figure whose deep grief reshapes her into a vengeful ghost mother rather than the powerless woman she once was. This sense of entrapment supports Ferguson Ellis's observation that the Gothic is deeply concerned with

domestic spaces that imprison women and with the ghostly "homelessness" that follows when they are cast out:

> Focusing on crumbling castles as sites of terror, and on homeless protagonists who wander the face of the earth, the Gothic, too, is preoccupied with the home. But it is a failed home that appears on its pages, the place from which some (usually "fallen" men) are locked out, and others (usually "innocent" women) are locked in. (1989, p. ix)

In this context, Eel Marsh House becomes the architectural embodiment of Jennet's suffering as a place haunted by the trauma of a silenced woman. When Arthur finally studies her face in detail, he finds himself unable to describe it clearly, perceiving only "a desperate, yearning malevolence; it was as though she were searching for something she wanted, needed . . . and which had been taken from her" (Hill, 2012, p. 75). Arthur feels terrified by "the combination of the peculiar, isolated place . . . and the dreadfulness of her expression" (p. 75), yet at the same time, he is driven by a growing curiosity to learn more about her as he is unable to grasp that she is not alive and does not believe in ghosts. Feeling suffocated by the gloomy atmosphere of the house, Arthur decides not to wait any longer for Mr Keckwick and sets out alone on foot toward Crythin Gifford. However, as he crosses the causeway, the thick mist blinds his vision, and he is abruptly overwhelmed by "the last noises of a pony and trap, carrying a child in it . . . dragged under by the quicksand" (p. 88), a sound that fills him with agony and terror.

No matter how unbelievable it seems, Arthur is eventually forced to accept the grim reality that the woman in black and the child dying in screams are "unreal, ghostly, things that were dead" (p. 97). Even though he initially wants to return to London as quickly as possible, Arthur gathers his courage to complete his work at Eel Marsh House, but no one, not even Mr. Jerome, is prepared to assist him. Mr Daily also considers Arthur foolish when he hears his plans, yet Arthur's determination persuades him to let his dog, Spider, accompany Arthur for protection. In the middle of the night, they are alarmed by a sound coming from a locked room, which Arthur later realises is the nursery that once belonged to Jennet's son. The voice they hear is both horrifying and strangely calm, producing an uncanny effect as familiar but unknown. Through the letters he discovers at Eel Marsh House, Arthur learns that Jennet, as an unmarried woman, is forced to give her child to Alice Drablow despite her resistance to such unfair and cruel treatment: "Why should I not have what is mine?" (p. 139). After adoption, they never wanted to let Jennet see her son, "brought up as a Drablow" (p. 183). After reading the letters, Arthur genuinely feels sorrow for Jennet and empathy for her suffering:

> Her passionate love for her child and her isolation with it, her anger and the way she at first fought bitterly against and, finally, gave despairingly in to the course proposed to her, filled me with sadness and sympathy. A girl from the servant class . . . might perhaps have fared better . . . than this daughter of genteel parentage, who had been so coldly rejected and whose feelings were so totally left out of the count. Yet servant girls in Victorian England had, I knew, often been driven to murder or abandon their misconceived children. (p. 176)

Arthur's reflection reveals how women across social classes were trapped by Victorian morality and patriarchy, making Jennet's despair and her transformation into the ghost mother upon the death of her son in an accident both a personal tragedy and a critique of systemic injustice.

Her transformation into the ghostly woman in black externalises her maternal grief: she becomes the embodiment of pain that cannot be expressed within patriarchal structures: "Mad with grief and mad with anger and a desire for revenge. She blamed her sister . . . She died in hatred and misery. And as soon as ever she died the hauntings began" (p. 185). However, the ghost mother's monstrosity and vengeance are inseparable from her deep sorrow. Her story echoes the central concerns of the Female Gothic, which represents the silencing of women's voices, the repression of desire and loss, and the haunting return of what patriarchy denies. In this sense, as Wallace (2009) clarifies, "one of the most powerful metaphors in feminist theory, the idea of woman as 'dead' or 'buried (alive)' within male power structures which render her 'ghostly' (…) made literal in the supposedly dead mother" (p. 26). Wallace's metaphor is vividly observed in *The Woman in Black*, where Jennet Humfrye becomes the literal manifestation of a woman 'buried alive' by patriarchal authority. Susan Hill accordingly expresses compassion for Jennet's maternal grief as the ghost mother, recognising that she cannot forgive or let go, even though "she is perpetrating evil . . . because the person who is most tormented by it all is her" (2003, p. 33). Her ghostly return makes visible the emotional and social pressure that Victorian culture imposed upon unmarried mothers, turning symbolic oppression into brutal haunting. As Wallace (2013) argues, "Gothic language and imagery – live burial or entombment, spectrality, death-in-life – extensively to symbolise the erasure of the feminine within history" (2013, pp. 52-53). This is brought to life through Jennet's haunting, transforming the buried feminine into a literal ghost whose return exposes her silenced maternal grief and repressed trauma.

Haunting as Resistance: Trauma of Loss and the Gothic Ghost

Whereas being forced to give up her child to her sister's family is already traumatising for Jennet Humfrye, witnessing his death as he is dragged into the quicksand in the mist inflicts an irreversible wound on her mind and soul. Devastated by the trauma of losing her child, Jennet eventually dies of heart disease in her thirties: "Whether because of her loss and her madness or what, she also contracted a disease which caused her to begin to waste away" (Hill, 2012, p. 185). Jennet's decline suggests that her physical deterioration is inseparable from her emotional suffering, indicating how unresolved trauma can manifest somatically. As Judith Herman, a professor of psychiatry, asserts in her *Trauma and Recovery*, "psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless" as children or women (1997, p. 33). Herman's perspective illustrates how Jennet's trauma is rooted in her social powerlessness, both as a single mother and as a woman silenced by patriarchal authority. Upon the child's adoption by Mrs Drablow, he is "never intended to know his mother" (Hill, 2012, p. 183). Yet Jennet returns to Crythin because of the overwhelming pain of being separated from him. Although the boy, Nathaniel, never knows that Jennet is his true mother, mother and son become increasingly attached to one another over time. Their forced emotional distance intensifies Jennet's trauma, as she is only permitted to watch her child grow up without ever acknowledging her presence.

Before the accident in which the boy, his little dog, the nursemaid, and the driver Mr Keckwick's father all drown in the quicksand, Jennet indeed plans to reclaim her child and take him away. Instead, Jennet can do nothing but helplessly watch him dying in screams, a moment that drives her into madness with grief and anger. Hence her suffering exemplifies Gilmore's notion of trauma as "the self-altering, even self-shattering experience" (2001, p. 6). In this sense, Jennet's trauma ultimately reappears as haunting which symbolises the return of the dead, the repressed, or the silenced. As Gordon (2008) identifies in *Ghostly Matters*, "the way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (p. 8). While the ghost mother makes visible the injustice, oppression, and even violence that society prefers to forget, haunting functions as a form of protest or resistance against the systems that attempt to erase or suppress such voices in life. On the other hand, her fierce desire for revenge turns her haunting into something genuinely terrifying and malevolent: "whenever she has been seen . . . there has been one sure and certain result . . . In some violent or dreadful circumstance, a child has died" (Hill, 2012, p. 186). Jennet wants others to suffer the same pain by losing their own children, and this desire leaves the entire town in fear.

The narrator Arthur Kipps's trauma in *The Woman in Black* is, at least initially, secondary and reflective, as he inherits Jennet's suffering through witnessing her haunting; however, it becomes primary and personal when the curse causes the loss of his own baby son and his wife, Stella, in his first marriage. After many painful years, Arthur finds happiness again and marries Esmé, who has four children from her previous marriage. At the beginning of the novel, however, Arthur's traumatic memories are awakened when Esmé's children begin telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve. Once his most distressing memories are triggered, Arthur becomes determined to write his ghost story in the hope of exorcising the repressed and silenced trauma of his past. As he admits, "I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was now woven into my very fibres, an inextricable part of my past" (p. 18), confirming that the trauma he seeks to confront has become an enduring part of his identity. In fact, through the act of writing, these buried memories are brought back into consciousness, allowing his trauma to be worked through in a repetitive process that reflects what Freud (1955) calls the "compulsion to repeat," defined as "the manifestation of the power of the repressed" (p. 20) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. His most agonising moment arises when he recalls the death of his family in a park outside London: "I have sat here at my desk, day after day . . . a blank sheet of paper before me, unable to lift my pen, trembling and weeping too" (Hill, 2012, p. 195). Jennet's haunting also makes Arthur feel truly "possessed by it . . . as though I had become paralyzed. I could not bear to stay there, for fear, but nor had I any strength left in my body to turn and run away" (pp. 75-76). His reactions reveal psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk's view of trauma as "the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (2015, p. 24), and this imprint becomes tragically evident when, despite believing the hauntings end after he departs from Crythin Gifford, he encounters the ghost mother again and ultimately suffers from the same fate as the townspeople and Mr. Jerome by losing his own child.

The final incident that pushes Arthur to decide sharply to leave the tragedies connected to Jennet Humfrye behind occurs when her terrifying presence emerges in the nursery room of Eel Marsh House, where her child once lived before his death. Her malevolence becomes even more apparent when she attempts to kill Mr Sam Daily's dog, Spider, by drawing it into the quicksand with a whistle. While desperately trying to save the dog, Arthur has a near-death experience and eventually faints. Mr Daily rescues him, takes him into his home, and gives him time to recover before going back to London. Arthur later explains his retreat from these dangers should not be mistaken for cowardice, because "when things supernatural,

insubstantial and inexplicable threaten not only his safety and well-being but his sanity, his innermost soul, then retreat is not a sign of weakness but the most prudent course" (Hill, 2012, p. 175). Jennet's fearsome haunting is, furthermore, not the only source of terror; Arthur is repeatedly tormented by the sound of her child dying in screams, a traumatic echo he hears over and over again. This auditory haunting overwhelms him, as he describes the "dreadful sequence of sounds repeated again, as would be repeated in (…) [his] head a thousand times forever after" (p. 143). In this respect, Arthur's experience appears to mirror Caruth's definition of trauma "as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (1996, p. 91). Such continuous replaying of the past, what Arthur also calls "an overdose of bad dreams" (Hill, 2012, p. 102), shows how profoundly the haunting affects him.

Almost losing his sense of reality, Arthur realises that every unbelievable thing he sees or hears alters him profoundly, becoming "fixed and immovable, perhaps during that restless, anguished sleep" (p. 97), and this transformation ultimately leads him to acknowledge that his "innocence, once lost, is lost forever" (p. 46). As Hill asserts in an interview with *The Telegraph* writer Flanagan, "There are these two sides in life, always: the innocent do suffer and there is evil" (2005, para. 13). *The Woman in Black*, therefore, presents evil not as an exaggerated supernatural threat but as an inherent part of human existence, rooted in the everyday realities of pain, injustice, and trauma. The haunting in the novel illustrates this inescapable coexistence of innocence and evil, revealing how unresolved human suffering can become a devastating and enduring presence as resistance. In this sense, Hill (2003) interprets Jennet as such a figure trapped in a cycle of trauma shaped by social cruelty, the loss of her child, and the denial of her maternal identity: "As long as this woman in her misery as a ghost continues to try and get revenge for what happened to her child, she will walk the earth unsettled and evil will just go on and on" (p. 32). In an interview with *The Guardian* reporter Kellaway, Jane Goldman, the screenwriter of *The Woman in Black*, portrays anger as a kind of disease and suggests that Jennet's misery inevitably "creates more misery" (2012, para. 14). Her vengeance in this cycle of trauma that manifests itself as haunting becomes both her pain and her punishment.

Due to the torment she inflicts not only on Arthur Kipps but on the entire town, Jennet Humfrye can be regarded as "an excessively transgressive Gothic 'heroine'" (Scullion, 2010, p. 296). After witnessing the unbearably tragic accident that leads to her son's death, Jennet dies in anguish as a lost

mother and is reborn as a ghost mother who is completely dehumanised by her suffering. Each appearance of her ghost signals the death of another child, signifying the eternal reenactment of her own loss and grief. This repetitive cycle eventually concludes with the death of Arthur's own baby boy, bringing the novel to its tragic close: "He lay crumpled on the grass below it, dead . . . I had seen the ghost of Jennet Humfrye and she had had her revenge" (Hill, 2012, p. 200). After discovering her tragic story in particular, Arthur always struggles to sympathise with Jennet as a "troubled woman, dead of grief and distress, filled with hatred and desire for revenge" (p. 194), considering her wickedness as understandable yet not forgivable. Instead of healing or resilience, Jennet's trauma returns in the form of haunting as resistance, so that she can be remembered. As a Gothic ghost mother, she becomes determined to punish the patriarchal world whose injustices deny and erase her maternal identity.

Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, as a renowned contemporary work of Gothic fiction, has attracted significant attention from visual media and achieved remarkable success both on stage and on screen. As Pegg (2012) maintains, "the play is the second longest-running play in the history of the West End . . . [and] the highest-grossing British horror film" in the UK for two decades (p. 1). Gumushan (2025) likewise reports in *WhatsOnStage* that the production of *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt, "played in the West End for 33 years, running for over 13,000 performances at the Fortune Theatre before closing in March 2023", and now it returns to the stage "for a UK tour in 2025 and 2026" (paras. 1-3). The 2012 film adaptation of the novel, on the other hand, marks a major revival of the Gothic ghost story on screen. Adapted for the screen by Jane Goldman and directed by James Watkins, the film introduces Jennet Humfrye and Arthur Kipps's story through the stars, Liz White and Daniel Radcliffe, to the new generation. The film also reflects the Gothic atmosphere of Eel Marsh House, the psychological horror of maternal grief, and the visual representation of Jennet as a ghost mother locked in sorrow and anger. Like in Hill's novel, the archetype of the Gothic ghost continues to powerfully shape contemporary British Female Gothic fiction, as seen in Catriona Ward's *Rawblood* (2015), Laura Purcell's *The Silent Companions* (2017), and Anita Frank's *The Lost Ones* (2019). In these works, women's suffering transforms into haunting that refuses to be buried or forgotten, acting as a powerful expression of silenced female trauma.

Conclusion

Female Gothic fiction, as exemplified by Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*,

has become a means of giving testimony for women whose identities are suppressed and often erased, both as women and as mothers. In this sense, the Gothic ghost embodies the return of silenced female histories, expressing repressed trauma through psychological or supernatural haunting as a form of resistance to women's oppression. Accordingly, in *The Woman in Black*, Hill inherits and revives the Female Gothic tradition to mirror contemporary women's trauma by recasting the ghost mother Jennet Humfrye's maternal grief over the loss of her son as vengeful monstrosity. When the narrator Arthur Kipps discovers Jennet's letters to her sister Alice Drablow, he can initially sympathise with her suffering after she is forcibly separated from her child. Jennet is harshly judged and rejected by Victorian morality for bearing an illegitimate child, Nathaniel, who later dies tragically in an accident by drowning in quicksand. Hence her grief and anger to return to the world as a fierce desire for revenge. Jennet's haunting, however, becomes both a weapon and a testimony to female repression as a mother in a patriarchal world that destroys her life. In this regard, her haunting represents unresolved traumatic memory and becomes a symbol for a feminist figure of women's resistance and rebellion as a Gothic ghost mother.

The Woman in Black speaks directly to ongoing concerns about women's oppression and the violence of a society that denies or controls their experience of both womanhood and motherhood. Although the novel is set in Victorian patriarchy and displays women's entrapment in domestic spaces through the metaphor of the haunted Eel Marsh House, many women across the world are still oppressed, exploited, condemned, and silenced. In Female Gothic fiction, dying paradoxically enables them to be seen and heard in ways they are never permitted while alive. The ghost thus becomes a mode of speech when their voices are denied, and a refusal to be forgotten. Jennet's ghostly revenge in *The Woman in Black* is not driven by cruelty alone but emerges from the depths of her profound pain as a mother who has lost everything. Yet her anguish has devastating consequences for the innocent: parents and children in Crythin Gifford, including Arthur and his family, suffer for witnessing her ghostly presence and lose their own children, which makes her both victim and victimiser. In Hill's novel, every character is touched by the trauma of loss, magnified by a ghost mother who refuses to forgive or fade away.

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