Adapting representations of death from page to screen in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983)

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Introduction

Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983; 1998) has been praised as a novella demonstrating a "gradual development of exquisite suspense" and distinguishing, in its subtlety, "the true ghost story" (Bann cited in Scullion, 2003: 296).[1] This article examines James Watkins' 2012 film adaptation with particular focus on representations of the complex relationship between death and screen, which will be addressed through a close reading of the novella alongside its filmic adaptation. Both Hill's (1983) novella and Watkins' (2012) adaptation are littered with representations of trauma, death, and the experience of dying, predominantly by women and children, who functioned on the outskirts of Victorian society and whose existence remained largely confined to the margins.[2] As such, this article serves to establish how the film adaptation upholds the Gothic through the representations of trauma, death, and dying in relation to Hill's (1983) novella with particular focus on the supernatural spectral haunting of Jennet Humfrye and the death that surrounds her at every turn. In terms of Watkins' (2012) film adaptation, my discussion will focus on those previously oversimplified representations of gender to demonstrate Watkins' critical commentary on the marginality of female trauma.

Haunting and trauma in the Gothic appear to be strongly related as haunting indicates the repetition of traumatic moments, arguably suggesting the spectre's compulsive psychological need to re-experience events as they happened - something which might not have been altogether possible in the moment of their occurrence. Such traumatic re-enactments are evident in *The Woman in Black* (1983) as both works (the novella and film, respectively) provide harrowing representations of the female spectre, so utterly traumatised by society's prejudice as a young unmarried mother and the loss of a young child, that she is compelled to impose similar trauma through death on those around her as restitution. Watkins' (2012) representation clearly possesses elements that are "inherently palimpsestuous" as he remains true to Hill's (1983) novella in many respects (Alexander cited in Hutcheon, 2006: 6). While this adaptation captures the essence of Hill's (1983) novella in many respects and provides a closely-related reimagining of traumatic death and dying, this reinterpretation differs from the novella mainly in the way in which the film opens and concludes.

This article then, through close analysis of the woman in black's metamorphosis from page to screen, will provide an examination of death and the supernatural, while investigating how Watkins' (2012) adaptation helps make sense of death and dying.[3] Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation* (2012) while largely critical of the practice of adaptation, acknowledges the pleasure accompanying changes between versions moving from page to screen. As such, Watkins' (2012) ending chooses to make amends between protagonist and antagonist without ever truly resolving the spectre's trauma, which arguably serves as the catalyst for her haunting. Despite resolving this conflict, Watkins (2012) opts to sacrifice the "woman in black with a wasted face" (Hill, 1998: 119) in exchange for the male protagonist's peace thereby reiterating the marginality of female trauma, and even death. Finally, this article will interrogate the ways in which death has been translated from page to screen in Watkins' (2012) film adaptation while exploring the ways gender is considered in relation to death.

Summary of *The Woman in Black* (1983)

The Woman in Black (1983) is the first-person account of Arthur Kipps, who works as a junior solicitor in London, and the plot therefore focuses on his reactions to the supernatural events he encounters. Kipps tells the story of his arrival at Eel Marsh House, where he is tasked with finalising the deceased Mrs Drablow's estate and legal affairs. While at Eel Marsh House, Kipps uncovers the dark secrets of the Drablow family. He sees a mourner at the old woman's funeral: a young woman dressed in black. He realises as events unfold, however, that this wasted young woman, who we later learn is Mrs Drablow's sister, Jennet Eliza Humfrye, is in fact the spectre that haunts the property, and who will continue to haunt him, both as the tormenting motivation to tell his story and as the ghost that appears to him, during his time at Eel Marsh House and beyond. Since Humfrye's death, unsettling and largely unexplained occurrences have taken place, stories of which have terrified the inhabitants of Crythin Gifford. As he himself becomes ensnared in the haunting of Eel Marsh House, Kipps, despite his confusion, remains determined to uncover the truth of what has happened in this fog-wreathed setting. He becomes intrigued by the story of the spectre that appears to have been so tied to it in life many years ago, as he begins to reveal the mystery and tragic past of this wayward spirit.

History of adapting *The Woman in Black* (1983): page, stage, and screen

The Woman in Black's (1983) cultural significance is firmly embedded in the British canon, extending beyond the pages of the novella into numerous, far-reaching contexts

including present-day school curriculum. While Hill's novella was first published in 1983, her text has seen multiple resurgences over the years. Since its initial release, it has been adapted to the theatre stage with its long-running production for the West End, adapted by Stephen Mallatrat in 1987 (Cox, 2000). Two years later, the television film adaptation was released in 1989, directed by Herbert Wise. Watkins' (2012) film adaptation followed later in cinemas in 2012, with the final, and arguably less acclaimed iteration directed more recently by Tom Harper entitled *The Woman in Black 2: Angel of Death,* being released in 2014.

Film adaptation and reimagined representations of death

Hutcheon argues for the oversimplification involved in the process of filmic adaptation as she explains that this exercise requires "severe pruning" of "intellectual content" (2006: 1). It is for this reason that she introduces her article 'Beginning to Theorize Adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?' with the following inclusion by Rabindranath Tagore who suggests that "[c]inema is still playing second fiddle to literature" (cited in Hutcheon, 2006: 1). Here, Hutcheon argues that "'to adapt' is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable" while recognising that "[a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7). Notably, Hutcheon's seemingly harsh critique of film adaptations (specifically of Victorian works) goes so far as to liken "film [to] a parasite and literature [to] its prey and victim" (3). Despite her reprobation, Hutcheon recognises that some benefit must be derived from these works, otherwise they would not exist at all. She goes on to explain this self-indulgence derived from adaptation in the following way:

> [this pleasure] comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; *so too is change* (Hutcheon, 2006: 3, emphasis added).

Taking my cue from Hutcheon's recognition of the alterations made to a primary work of fiction, Watkins' (2012) film adaptation possesses palimpsestuous elements by remaining true to the original to a large extent (Alexander cited in Hutcheon, 2006). The film captures the essence of Hill's (1983) novella and provides a closely-related reimagining of *The Woman in Black* (1983). From its outset, Watkins' (2012) adaptation is heavily laden with representations of trauma, death, and dying while enticing the audience's imagination to elicit fear (Watkins cited in Turek, 2012). However, his treatment of the woman in black's presence for Kipps suggests an alternate representation of the role of the raging mother, who has been marginalised

by Victorian society (Cox, 2000). Arguably, Watkins' (2012) adaptation introduces a level of complexity for Humfrye's character, by allowing her to triumph as the malevolent force (notably, over a male victim) in the film, which he acknowledges is centred on the loss of loved ones (Watkins cited in Empire Magazine, 2012). Watkins (2012) comments on the risks of being female during the nineteenth-century, by suggesting that death and dying are not far off consequences for women, who exist outside the clear societal confines dictated by patriarchal Victorian society, most notably, as unwed mothers. One instance in which this commentary can be observed, almost as a warning, is during the film's opening scene. The audience encounters three angelic-looking female children seated in a purpose-built nursey filled with porcelain dolls and a China tea set; a make-believe tea party is underway. This scene appears particularly out of place for this well-known adaptation, notorious for its recurring representations of death and dying. However, this false sense of security is quickly subverted when, without warning, the children pause their game to stare directly into the camera's lens before abandoning their play as though following instructions from an unseen force in the room. Watkins' (2012) representation of the previously domesticated woman, who is suddenly freed from the confines of the home, is an idea also explored by Robin Roberts, who argues that the "repressed feminine cannot be completely contained" (2014: 126).

Laura Mulvey maintains that the use of such "freeze frames" (for example, when the children stare motionlessly into the camera) evokes a sense of a time 'before' the moving image (2006: 67). This suggestion of a time preluding the image in this instance serves to demonstrate the continuity of the trauma imposed on characters by the woman in black throughout the plot while reinforcing the repetitive representations of trauma, death, and dying. Such static moments serve to enhance the presence of threat, which ultimately, recurs throughout the film's duration (Mulvey, 2006). While making their way to the panelled windows, as though instructed, they trample on and destroy their previously adored dolls and tea set – shattering the delicate China while crushing the dolls' fragile heads with their boots – a clear rebellion against domesticity. Still seemingly mesmerised by an unseen presence, the children step up onto the windowsill before leaping through the windows before falling to their deaths.[4]

The audience's first encounter with death in Watkin's (2012) adaptation not only startles, because represents the deaths of three innocents, but it also serves as a foreshadowing of the trauma, death, and dying, which pervades the film's remaining scenes. The significance of this scene at the outset, is that the three female children die, consequently while playing 'house' before abandoning the activity in response to an unseen outside force. This realisation ultimately introduces Watkins' (2012) critical commentary on the dangers of defying the confines of domesticity for women during this period, which is represented by their deaths following the destruction of the once beloved tea set.

While Hutcheon argues for the limitations posed by adaptation, the above example demonstrates a clear motivation for why we can, and should, examine the movement from page to screen. The reimagining of societal norms that should, like female oppression and marginalisation through domesticity, be critiqued and abandoned. Hutcheon cautions against the re-representations of time-honoured tales, such as *The Woman in Black* (1983), and suggests that both pleasure and risk exist when "experiencing an adaptation" (Hutcheon, 2006: 3). However, it is this re-experiencing and repetition that allows us to critically examine the imbalances presented in bygone eras, which in turn, works to eradicate these inequalities, one trampled tea set at a time.

Misrepresentations of female trauma through death

Watkins' (2012) film presents a harrowing representation of the female spectre (Humfrye), who is so utterly traumatised by society's prejudice as a young unmarried mother and the loss of a young child, that she is compelled to impose similar trauma through death on those around her as restitution. After falling pregnant out of wedlock, Humfrye was forced by her family to give her young son up for adoption to the legitimately married Drablows (her sister and brother in-law). While at Eel Marsh House, Kipps finds evidence of the "infant son of Humfrye [who] was become by adoption the child of Morgan Thomas Drablow of Eel Marsh House, Crythin Gifford, and his wife Alice" (Hill, 1998: 139). He discovers that the adoption of Humfrye's son, Nathaniel, takes place under duress, as he finds letters in which Humfrye refuses to give up her child, stating that "they would never be parted" (139). A few years after his adoption, however, Humfrye's son dies, inciting her further pain, trauma, and rage. Adding to her devastation, is the fact that Humfrye *hears* her son's final desperate moments, as he is dragged under by the pony trap. Humfrye's inability to save her son, reinforces her helplessness

while emphasising her marginality and complicating her perceived inability to care for him. His unavoidable death further complicates her role as unwed mother, by demonstrating her lack of autonomy in the patriarchal society, from which she remains firmly excluded. This experience ultimately propels Humfrye into her role as a malevolent force in the novella, as she attempts to seize back her power.

In the Gothic, female characters are too frequently assigned the role of "alien outsider", thus supporting gender stereotypes through being "passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional" (Abrams and Harpham, 2015: 125). However, *The Woman in Black*'s (1983) subversion of gender roles seeks to reposition this predictable stature of women through the villainess, Humfrye, who is pitiable because of the tragic heartbreak she has experienced upon losing her young son, Nathaniel, but also feared due to her consequent attempts to take revenge.[5] This tragic loss of her son, and her subordinate position as an unmarried mother who is not permitted to care for him, foreground her oppression and marginalisation. *The Woman in Black* (1983) complicates the connection between the Gothic tropes of marginalised figures of women and children by entangling their experiences of otherness.

One such example is when, after spending time in the deserted house, Kipps discovers that Humfrye's spectre haunts the grounds and anyone who visits the estate. Moreover, part of her haunting of Eel Marsh House relates to the fact that she was coerced to give up her child to her sister, who ultimately could not protect him from harm, despite what was perceived by society as the 'safety' of the Drablows' marriage. As the plot progresses, we discover that part of Humfrye's revenge is against society's opinions of women and the rules regarding legitimacy. Such importance placed on marriage reflects the rigid moral and social Victorian notions that utterly marginalised unwed mothers. Humfrye's hauntings of Eel Marsh House are predominantly fuelled by a need to express her long suppressed feelings of rage towards her sister and society for her marginalisation as a young unwed mother. Similarly, while watching Humfrye's perceived triumph over the male protagonist on screen in the final scene in Watkins' (2012) adaptation, we recoil and find ourselves occupying what Elisabeth Bronfen terms the "interstice between an aesthetic and empathetic response" (1992: 44). This reaction, in turn, is fuelled by the sympathy we feel for Humfrye based on her life experiences, which serve to further complicate her status as spectre after her death.

As such, our sympathy for Humfyre's position represents the archetypal female "victim-hero", which is characteristically observed in the genre and is considered to add complexity to the representations of gender (Clover cited in Kamm and McDonald, 2019: 1). Even when Humfrye tries to establish some form of connection to her child after his adoption by the Drablows, this too is denied: "Alice Drablow would not let her see the boy at all" (Hill, 1998: 184). Humfrye's unwavering mourning for her son, and her double loss of him (through adoption and death), is undeniable. While she is largely presented in the film as a malevolent spectre, both this tragic death and her inability to see her son after his adoption, allows Humfrye to gain sympathy from the audience. It is for this reason, that Humfrye finds some form of freedom from her subordinate role as a woman trapped by the constraints of Victorian society after her death. Tragically and disastrously, she finds autonomy only after her death: only as a spectre can she attempt to find her voice, emphasise her role as Nathaniel's mother, and wreak havoc on society. Even Kipps is able to understand and sympathise with the vengeful acts of the ghost of Humfrye as he deliberates upon the events that have taken place:

> [s]he had been a poor, crazed, troubled woman, dead of grief and distress, filled with hatred and desire for revenge. Her bitterness was understandable, the wickedness that led her to take away other women's children because she had lost her own, understandable too but not forgivable (Hill, 1998: 194).

Political and societal pressure is exerted on Humfrye when she is forced to give her son up for adoption against her will. The trauma of this experience leads to her violent acts as she attempts to avenge the loss of her son, thus arguably situating the reason for the hauntings within a malevolent *society* rather than simply within a malevolent and otherwise marginal supernatural entity. Notably, women living during the Victorian era, specifically unwed mothers, went unrepresented by the law. Thus, Humfrye's unwed status places her in a doubly disenfranchised position. In this way, *The Woman in Black* (1983) presents a strong social critique, one which surpasses individual characters who have mistreated each other to point to gender inequality during this period. Humfrye embodies the vengeful maternal figure, thereby encompassing the villain and victim simultaneously. Interestingly, her roles represents the fluidity of her spectral identity as villain. Humfrye displays a moral duality evident in the way in which she represents women marginalised as unwed mothers during the Victorian era and yet is a figure of vengeance and terror. Because her son was born out of wedlock, a taboo at the time (Sheetz-Nguyen, 2012), Humfrye is viewed by society as less capable than a married woman of caring for her own infant. She is thus forced to give her son up for adoption to her

sister, *Mrs* Alice Drablow, who is married and therefore, in the view of society, better suited for childcare. While the spectral Humfrye is malevolent, causing pain to others, her unwavering mourning for her son, and her double loss of him (through adoption and death), is undeniable. It is this grief that spurs her ghost to take the lives of the children of Crythin Gifford. Humfrye is therefore both victim and villain in *The Woman in Black* (1983), becoming the embodiment of complex questions of individual and social morality.

Even though Humfrye brings further fear to the townspeople of Crythin Gifford by taking the lives of some of the villagers' children, she has a motive for her vengeance. Humfrye's spectre thus embodies a representation on women's perceived inferiority, evident in Victorian society, and beyond. Her frustrations with a patriarchal system, which denies her autonomy as a woman to make decisions for the wellbeing of her own child, emphasise the film's concern with historical gender inequality and how this continues to haunt its characters and, by extension, the contemporary moment. During her lifetime and after her death, she is marginalised as an unwed woman without a legitimate place in patriarchal society, and later, as a spectre doomed to haunt Eel Marsh House and Crythin Gifford as a reminder, perhaps, of the ongoing suppression of women. While her actions are horrifying, her motives for her actions are clear given the way in which she has been treated. Furthermore, her attempts to seek revenge on the society that has marginalised her, and that has been indirectly responsible for the death of her son, are justifiable.

Humfrye faces the impossible choice of remaining silent, as many unwed Victorian mothers were forced to do, or avenging the unfair stereotypes of Victorian society (the novella, in its Gothic focus on the spectral, suggests that the latter was not even possible during her lifetime, thus emphasising the intractability of patriarchal society). Part of Humfrye's revenge, in death, is against society's notions of legitimacy and the 'sanctity' of marriage – above all, against the unrealistic angel-in-the-home model so beloved of Victorian society (Gilbert and Gubar, 1980). The trauma Humfrye herself has experienced, which has gone unnoticed during her lifetime due to the social conditions that once required her to give up her child before his death, is sustained throughout the film. Kipps, as a male solicitor, and one who is engaged to be married at the time, is an effective victim for Humfrye whose rage targets not Kipps himself, but rather, what he represents: patriarchal society and its adherence to only legitimising married women as mothers. In this way, it could be argued that Humfrye's role offers a challenge to a fragile patriarchal system (Buckley, 2019). The open-ended nature of the story and its lack of

closure suggests that not only Kipps will be haunted, but the reader too, thus demanding that social attention be directed towards Humfrye's plight and to such social inequity in general.

Marginalised death and dying on screen

Margarita Georgieva suggests in *The Gothic Child* (2013: 2) that the presence of children allows the narrator to "take into account that person's [the narrator's] innocence or lack of knowledge, their potential for development or their intellectual pliability". The appearance of children as a symbol to reinforce the presence of malevolence and uneasiness is evident in various filmic and literary works, albeit through different treatments, such as in John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), and, in more recent years, Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* (2009). These associations are evident in *The Woman in Black* (1983), when Kipps hears "the sound of children's voices" coming from within the walls of the school yard (Hill, 1998: 52). While seemingly innocent, the presence of children is evidently far more sinister than may at first be apparent. Indeed, because children represent purity in many contexts, their inclusion as a malicious force is an approach often adopted by authors and filmmakers to subvert the idea of innocence and to add to the uncanny (Freud, 1919) dimensions of the plot. The uncanny children in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), for example, undermine the normative association of children with innocence, a feature too, of Watkins' (2012) film. Watkins' (2012) adaptation upholds these Gothic tropes through his own representations of trauma, death, and dying with particular focus on the supernatural spectral haunting of Humfrye and the death that surrounds her at every turn. Both Hill's (1983) novella and Watkins' (2012) adaptation are littered with representations of trauma, death, and the experience of dying, predominantly experienced by women and children. Notably, women and children functioned on the outskirts of society and remained largely confined to the margins. In keeping with this theme, they remain at the centre of the film's tragedy.

In the film, the audience is confronted with "that row of small, solemn faces, with hands all gripping the railings, that surrounded the school yard, on the day of Mrs Drablow's funeral" (Hill, 1998: 186). These are the ghosts of children who have died after Humfrye's spectral appearances. Moreover, the "very heart of the haunting" (170) inside Eel Marsh House is discovered by the protagonist as being in "a child's nursery" (147). This uneasy presence of the children acts as a precursor to Kipps' own worst nightmare that occurs later on as he

uncovers the frightening link that exists between the children in Crythin Gifford and the woman in black:

> [...] whenever she has been seen [...] in the graveyard, on the marsh, in the streets of the town, however briefly, and whoever by, there has been one sure and certain result. [...] In some violent or dreadful circumstance, a child has died (Hill, 1998: 186).

Humfrye's deathly visage at bleak locations, such as the graveyard and on the marsh, throughout the film reinforces the sense of dread regarding her true intentions. It is evident to Kipps that the spectre's presence gives rise to further trauma in the lives of those who encounter her as "[i]n spectral form, she repeatedly inflicts suffering on families by causing the death of their children" (Scullion, 2003: 292). Thus, the woman in black's repressed femininity poses a clear threat to the patriarchal society, which has marginalised her throughout her life (Roberts, 2014: 126). It is this suffering of children that is considered a "distinctively nightmarish" (306) representation of on-screen death. As the plot progresses, we learn about the events surrounding the adoption and consequent death of a young child on the Eel Marsh House estate years ago, which resulted in Nathaniel Humfrye's death, also depicted on screen later on. While working his way through Mrs Drablow's endless documents, Kipps uncovers "three death certificates", indicating the severity of events that took place in Mrs Drablow's house (Hill, 1998: 176; Watkins, 2012). Kipps examines these documents and finds that "[t]he first was of the boy, Nathaniel Drablow, at the age of six years. The cause of death was given as drowning" (Hill, 1998: 176).

In the film, haunting and trauma appear to be strongly related. Haunting suggests the repetition of traumatic moments, arguably suggesting the spectre's compulsive psychological need to re-experience them as they happened, something which might not have been altogether possible in the moment of their occurrence. As Cathy Caruth (1995: 151) argues, "what is particularly striking in this singular experience [of trauma] is that its insistent re-enactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred". The death of Humfrye's son, for example, is re-enacted during Kipps's stay at Eel Marsh House when, making his way through the marshes in search of the house, he realises that he "was hearing, beyond any doubt, appalling last noises of a pony and trap, carrying a child in it" (Hill, 1998: 88). In addition to causing him significant psychological distress, it makes him question his own sense of reality:

> The noise of the pony trap grew fainter and then stopped abruptly and away on the marsh was a curious draining, sucking, churning sound, which went on, together with the shrill neighing and whinnying of a horse in panic, and then I heard another cry, a shout, a terrified sobbing – it was hard to decipher – but with horror I realized it came from a child, a young child (Hill, 1998: 87-88).

As the horror of this moment suggests, not only is Kipps's trauma significant, but the trauma experienced by *other* characters leads to the haunting of Eel Marsh House. These traumatic re-enactments of painful memories "serve as record of the past" (Caruth, 1995: 151) and allow Humfrye to re-experience her trauma but also to transfer it to a witness, Kipps, thereby possibly alleviating it – at the very least, communicating it – to some extent. In this way, Humfrye, and by extension Kipps, are haunted by the past and loss of her son, as even after her death she tries desperately to avenge him by exerting pain on others through the loss of their own children. Arguably, she experiences "possession by the past" (151) as a result of her subordinate role in society and inflicts another kind of "possession by the past" on those who experience her spectral haunting too.

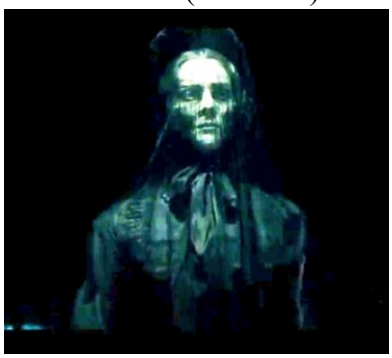
Kipps' difficulty in identifying the exact origins of the noise heightens his anxiety and before long, he returns to the marshes where he originally heard the panicked "cry" and "terrified sobbing" (Hill, 1998: 87). He locates a memorial in the marshes, which undoubtedly marks the accident's location, and enlists Samuel Daily, a wealthy landowner who befriends him on the train en-route to Crythin Gifford, to help him unearth the sunken pony trap. After wading through the marshes and almost drowning himself, Kipps manages to pull up the pony trap and seize the mud-soaked figure from its tomb. The audience comes to realise that the small body Kipps unearths from the mud and later cradles, is that of Nathaniel Drablow, who drowned years earlier after being pulled under in the pony trap. Kipps recounts that the shock associated with this death is amplified due to the realisation that such a tragedy had befallen "a young child" (88).

In addition to these reimagined representations of death and dying, Watkins' (2012) most noteworthy departure from the novella remains the film's ending. While Hill's (1983) novella ends in tragedy, as Kipps is forced to live through yet another trauma at the hands of Humfrye's spectre as he is compelled to watch the deaths of his young son and bride, Watkins' (2012) representation subverts this resolution. In the film adaptation, however, Watkins (2012) constructs an alternate ending that is somewhat more amiable while being far more controversial, in that this adaptation reinforces Humfrye's marginalised position in society,

while avoiding the sense of closure provided for her character in the novella. The film concludes with Kipps being seen off by Daily at the train station as the protagonist is finally reunited with his young son. His son appears to be drawn to something on the train tracks and manages to scamper down to take a closer look. At this moment, Watkins' (2012) protagonist's eyes meet those of the woman in black once more, before he catches out of the corner of his eye his son walking along the tracks towards a fast-approaching train. He quickly jumps onto the railway line to intersect and save the boy, but is instantly killed by the incoming train, son in arms. The train quickly speeds by Daily who perceives that same "row of small, solemn faces" (Hill, 1998: 186) that had first appeared surrounding the school yard. Here, the uncanny children fulfil the role of spectator to two more on-screen deaths. Their appearance startles the audience, as their ghostly faces are reflected in the passing train's windows, watching on as Kipps and his young, cherub-faced son are hit by the speeding locomotive. It is then that the audience realises that Kipps and his young son are both dead and reunited with Kipps' young wife, Stella, who died years earlier. The young family walk hand-in-hand along the train tracks and into the misty fog, which is reminiscent of the opening pages of the novella, thereby bringing the narrative full circle while aligning closely with the atmosphere Hill (1983) originally created. In this ending, Watkins (2012) uses "death as a figuration of closure" (Mulvey, 2006: 71). And so, Watkins' (2012) trope of an innocent child's death at the hands of the woman in black repeats itself. In addition to creating an atmosphere of foreboding while bringing Watkins' (2012) harrowing representations of death full circle, the presence of children serves as an integral portrayal of on-screen trauma, death, and dying.

While unsettling, Watkins' (2012) ending allows for a seeming acquiescence to be reached between the woman in black and Kipps instead of keeping the protagonist at odds with the malevolent spectre, as observed in the novella. In this regard, there exists a sense of closure for Kipps and his family as they are laid to rest after being reunited. The film's conclusion adheres closely with what film scholar and critic, Peter Brooks characterises as "narrative closure", which functions to "return [the story] to stasis" through representations of death (cited in Mulvey, 2006: 71). Brooks goes on to describe the hero's death in film as an event that establishes both "silence and stillness" propelling forward towards a "human end" (72) in the story world. However, while Kipps' death signifies the movement from one realm to another (living to dead), it also denotes what Mulvey argues is a new phase in the narrative (94). This new phase represents both the continuation of the woman in black's haunting of others, but also serves as a restoration of the trauma she is doomed to undergo for all eternity.

Don Tresca maintains that in film, "the camera, instead of becoming an instrument of knowledge and protection, becomes an instrument of destruction and death" (2011: 46) to its characters. This argument is observed in the the final shot of the film, which shows a close-up of the woman in black. In this final shot, Humfrye gazes directly at the film viewer using a "freeze frame", which, as argued earlier, harks back to a time 'before' while suggesting a continuity of trauma for the other characters in the film at the hands of the woman in black (Mulvey, 2006: 67). Our lasting glance at this grotesque figure's facial expression, which is described as both "desperate" and "yearning" (Hill, 1998: 75) suggests that the spectre continues to roam free, thereby leaving the film's conclusion open-ended for the audience.[6]



While the film in its entirety subscribes to the Gothic and mirrors the novella closely, it is evident that Watkins' (2012) interpretation of how the story should conclude differs significantly from Hill's (1983) original representation. Even though she appears to have triumphed over Kipps by exacting her revenge on the male hero, she remains left behind, staring into the family's reunited silhouettes as they retreat into the next realm beyond this world – together and as a family. Ultimately, Watkins' (2012) ending reinforces Humfrye's isolation from her young son while emphasising her role as a marginalised figure, destined to exist on the outskirts of society for eternity. This finality of her role as outsider to society's sympathies advances Brooks' theory regarding death as a representation of closure (cited in Mulvey, 2006: 71). And as such, the woman in black's story remains one of the 'othered' mother. She is destined to remain traumatised by the separation from and death of her young child due to the societal pressures of the time and remains in the liminal state between life and death – as a spectre. In the film, her fate is reinforced by the parting shot where she is left alone on the platform staring into the camera's lens. This lack of closure for Humfrye lends itself to the misrepresentations of female trauma, while addressing issues pertaining to the treatment of on-screen death and dying experienced by marginalised groups in society (in this case, women and children). Moreover, the representations of death on screen in Watkins' (2012) adaptation mirror Stratton's argument that "the death that is now meaningful is not 'natural' death but violent death" (2020: 3).

Both in the novella and its adaptation, it becomes evident that these violent deaths, while horrifying, mostly in relation to marginalised women and children, allow Humfrye to

escape her own previously marginalised existence. Her violent acts help her to break free from the shadows momentarily, if only for long enough to take the lives of the townspeople's children as recompense for her own suffering. Thus, Watkins' (2012) closing scene aligns closely with Brooks' (1992) theory as it interrogates death's translation from page to screen while exploring the ways in which gender is considered in relation to death.

Conclusion

The Woman in Black (1983) is emphatically and self-consciously concerned with the ways women are "trapped by the social institutions that shape their lives [...] they are trapped by the mere fact of being women" (Heiland, 2008: 91). Through their representations of trauma, death, and dying, both Hill (1983) and Watkins (2012) capture the existence of societal inequalities based on gender. Watkins' (2012) portrayal of on-screen death underscores Humfrye's complexity as a character while simultaneously challenging stereotypical, flat depictions of female characters in the Gothic. By choosing to sacrifice Humfrye in exchange for the male protagonist's peace at the film's end, Watkins' (2012) adaptation reiterates commentary on the marginality of female trauma, and even death. In her spectral vengeance, Humfrye exemplifies to some extent the previously silenced voices of those marginalised in society. Notably, her very helplessness in life, contrasted against her supernatural fury in death, emphasises women's subordinate position in Victorian society, which is captured by the startling representations of on-screen death in the film. Just as the parting shot of the woman in black stares the audience down through to the credits, so the audience is forced to look on as spectators, and indeed as accomplices, to the injustices she was forced to endure while remaining doomed to relive her renewed trauma through death.

[1] *The Woman in Black* was first published in 1983, however, directly quoted material is sourced from the 1998 edition.
[2] For ease of reference, and to clarify when the film, novella, or play is being discussed, I will indicate the respective years. For example: 1983 and 1998 refer to the novella; 2012 to Watkins' film; 1987 to the original theatre production.
[3] '*The Woman in Black'* refers to Hill's (1983) novella and its adaptations, while 'the woman in black' refers to the eponymous character, Jennet Humfrye.
[4] Image from: *The Woman in Black,* James Watkins (Director), Momentum Pictures, 2012.

[5] Other complex female villains in Victorian and twentieth-century fiction include Isabella Thorpe in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey (*1817), Carmilla in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and The White Witch in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1994).

[6] Image from: *The Woman in Black*, James Watkins (Director), Momentum Pictures, 2012.

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