Finance, Fundamentalist, Frankenstein: Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* as Late-Capitalist Hyper-Gothic Adaptation

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Late-capitalist hyper-gothic is, in many ways, a Frankensteinian creation. It is the combination of the financial and the gothic in such a way that creates something new, extreme, and in many cases, monstrous. As outlined in my previous work, late-capitalist hyper-gothic is defined as a subgenre of American gothic literature in which the influence of finance acts as an accelerator to literary gothic conventions, leading to the creation of narrative hyper-reality.[1] This fusion of finance and the gothic may appear, at first glance, to be an unnatural combination. Finance is often presented to the general public as grounded in truth, as dealing with measurable and material forms of value, and as having a substantial impact on the real lives of those it effects, and thus in complete opposition to the openly fictitious and often frivolous nature of the gothic genre.

However, while it is certainly true that finance has a real effect on the real lives of real people, the idea that financial value itself is real or material is demonstrably incorrect. After all, finance deals with prospective capital, with value that will hopefully become real in the future through insurance payments, speculative lending, and futures trading, but that is not currently materially real in the present moment. This immateriality classifies financial value as inherently fictitious, a product of the imagination that is believed to be real but does not currently exist.[2] Moreover, the spectral nature of this value, as dually present and absent, colours finance as a specifically gothic phenomenon. Indeed, the bleeding of gothic vernacular into the financial realm by way of 'spectral debt', 'vampire corporations', and 'zombie banks' demonstrates an awareness of the gothicisation of finance from the perspective of the market

[1] See Amy Bride, 'Byronic Bateman: The Commodity Vampire, Surplus Value, and the Hyper-Gothic in *American Psycho* (1991)', *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 14 (2015), pp. 3-18; and Bride, 'Re/possessed: The Haunted House, Spectral Debt, and the Hyper-Gothic in *Lunar Park* (2005)', *Supernatural Studies*, 3.2 (2016), pp. 36-48.

[2] The notion of finance as fiction has been explored by a number of recent New Economic Critics, including Jens Beckert, 'Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations in the Economy', *Theory and Society*, 42.3 (2013), pp. 219-40, doi:10.1007/s11186-013-9191-2; Max Haiven, *Cultures of Financialization: Fictitious Capital in Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Peter Knight, *Reading the Market: Genres of Financial Capitalism in Gilded Age America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016); and Nicky Marsh, *Money, Speculation, and Finance in Contemporary British Fiction* (Continuum, 2007).

itself.[3] While certainly not a commonly recognised connection, the relationship between finance and the gothic is therefore surprisingly natural, at the same time that the ghostly qualities of each realm designate this relationship as supernatural.

It is then in the product of the fusion of finance and the gothic that the Frankensteinian nature of late-capitalist hyper-gothic must be identified. Hyperreality is itself a monstrous narrative form, at once real, unreal, and more than real in an echo of the overlapping human, subhuman, and superhuman qualities of Mary Shelley's fictional Creature.[4] The hyperreal's simultaneous construction from and erasure of the real recalls the Creature's construction from body parts, which both reifies and overrides the original identities to which those parts belong. There is also a sense of uncontrollability about the hyperreal; as Jean Baudrillard identifies, once the hyperreal has been established, it will go on to recreate hyperreality in place of the real indefinitely, thereby enacting the fears of Victor Frankenstein regarding the potential for reproduction if the Creature were to be granted a mate.[5] In terms of late-capitalist hyper-gothic, the hyperreality created by the combination of finance and the gothic not only transforms the fictional realm of the gothic novel so that it is both conscious of its own fictionality and purporting to exist as part of the reader's real world, but also highlights the inherent fictionality of the finance that is treated as real by the reader, despite being entirely imaginary. Late-capitalist hyper-gothic thus not only reproduces the hyperreal in line with Baudrillard's argument, but actually allows the reader to recognise the presence of existing hyperrealities in their everyday life, and thus drags the financial realm into the realm of fiction at the same time that the gothic shifts out of the fictional realm and permeates our own reality.

Of course, Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, and the general concept of hyperness more widely, is rooted in late twentieth-century understandings of replication and simulation in capitalism and culture having reached a point of oversaturation, extremity, and mass-infiltration of everyday life. From our current, twenty-first-century perspective, this may now feel somewhat naïve, particularly in light of the contemporary pervasiveness of social media, the creation of Facebook's Meta, deepfakes, advancements in VR technology, fake news, the US Supreme Court's desire to create a 'domestic supply of infants' following the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, and governmental use of algorithms to determine medical provisions, educational

[3] See Paul Crosthwaite, 'Phantasmagoric Finance: Crisis and the Supernatural in Contemporary Finance Culture', in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. by Crosthwaite (Routledge, 2011), pp. 178-200.
[4] Jean Baudrillard defines hyperreality as 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.' Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1.
[5] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 2.

outcomes, and the suitability of American citizens for investment via Social Impact Bonds.[6] Likewise, the notion of late capitalism as paired with postmodernism by Fredric Jameson is perhaps no longer as relevant or revelatory as it was in the 1990s. At face value, Jameson's recognition of the digitalisation of money, rampant commodification, globalisation, and neoliberalism as changing the cultural and capitalist landscape beyond the former limits of modernism are, in essence, still applicable today. However, the emergence of new financial phenomena such as the introduction of contactless payments, cryptocurrency, non-fungible tokens, and *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) – which protects the rights of corporations to donate to political campaigns under the First Amendment – suggest that we have already outgrown Jameson's pre-millennial perspective. Indeed, if we are now to believe that we have moved beyond the confines of postmodernism into what critics are variously identifying as 'post-postmodernism', 'late postmodernism', 'trans-postmodernism', 'post-millennialism', and 'metamodernism', then it might also be productive to think of the current moment as one of 'post-late capitalism', and thereby locate ourselves a stage onwards from Jameson's theories.[7]

However, there remains something substantial to be gained by looking back at this previous stage in which the notions of hyperreality in relation to late capitalism came to the fore. While no longer experiencing the exact conditions identified by Baudrillard and Jameson, the current socio-political and economic environment of the West is undoubtedly a product of this earlier period. The immediate value of examining and re-examining the relationship between finance, culture, and hyperreality during the 1980s and 90s is thus in what it can reveal about our own current moment and the ways in which the contradictions, loopholes, and nuances of the contemporary financial market have been allowed to develop over the past forty years. Beyond this, there is something powerful, and perhaps even dangerous, in our contemporary habit of classifying the late-twentieth century as a period of hyperness that demands critical attention. If, as aforementioned, the current financial environment is more

[6] See Justice Samuel Alito, Opinion No. 19-1392, *Supreme Court of the United States*, 1st draft (leaked), 10 February 2022, p. 34, n. 46 <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/21835435/scotus-initial-draft.pdf> [accessed: 14 September 2022]; and Zenia Kish and Justin Leroy, 'Bonded Life: Technologies of Racial Finance from Slave Insurance to Philanthrocapital', *Cultural Studies*, 29.5-6 (2015), pp. 630-51, doi:10.1080/09502386.2015.1017137.

[7] See Tom Turner, *The City as Landscape: A Post-Postmodern View of Design and Planning* (Taylor & Francis, 2014); Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (AIAA, 2005); Mikhail Epstein, *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (Berghahn Books, 2016); Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford University Press, 1993); and Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture,* 2.1 (2010), pp. 5677-90, doi:10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677.

extreme than ever before, then our characterisation of the 1980s and 90s as an enclosed moment of hyperreality acts to disguise and belittle this extremity, thereby making it more insidious by way of its perceived normalcy. It is therefore imperative to examine the cultural presentation of late twentieth-century hyperrealities in order to dissect the existence and distortion of millennial hyperrealities that continue to contribute to financial and political disenfranchisement. This is in addition to what a recognition of late-capitalist hyper-gothic will contribute to the ongoing development of the Economic Humanities and New Economic Criticism, which reads literature and cultural productions as in diagnostic conversation with the market and capitalist concerns. The inclusion of genre fiction in New Economic Critical Studies is still a recent development, with few volumes dedicated to analysing the economic and financial influences of gothic fiction in particular.[8] Not only will any work on late-capitalist hyper-gothic expand this growing crossover between the Economic Humanities and Genre Studies, but it will also counter a number of positions within Gothic Studies that argue the gothic either wanes, loses impact, or else fizzles away sometime around the 1980s.[9]

My previous work on late-capitalist hyper-gothic focused on the work of Bret Easton Ellis – as this article does also – from different perspectives. My reading of *American Psycho* (1991) characterised Patrick Bateman as a commodity-vampire who is fuelled by late-capitalist commercialisation and surplus value, and whose consumption of goods, brands, and bodies sustains his own fragmented and commodified identity. In retrospect, this reading is primarily concerned with hyper-gothic bodies. Not only is Bateman himself a body constructed of empty signifiers and fetishised brand labels that fail to register any substantive meaning on the social scene of 1980s New York, but Bateman's destruction, disassembly, and dematerialisation of the bodies of his victims transforms the human corpse into a space whose passages and orifices recreate the castles and dungeons of classic gothic literature.[10] The intensity of Bateman's violence and the magnified view it provides of the human body, along with Bateman's recognition of his own immateriality, designate *American Psycho* as late-capitalist hyper-

[8] See Gail Turley Houston, *From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism* (BRILL, 2011); and Annalee Newitz, *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (Duke University Press, 2006). My own monograph, *Financial Gothic: Monsterized Capitalism in American Gothic Fiction* (University of Wales Press, 2023) addresses the lack of critical attention on the intersection between finance and the gothic.

[9] In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach claims that '[w]hen Ronald Reagan's powerful persona took control of the American imagination in the 1980s, vampires began to die'; in an early edition of *Gothic*, Fred Botting argues that the gothic has died by the end of the twentieth century. See Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.7; and Botting, *Gothic* (Routledge, 1996), p. 170.

[10] Bride, 'Byronic Bateman', pp. 8-11 and pp. 14-16.

gothic, with its characterisation of commodity consumption as vampiric enabling the reader to recognise the gothic nature of late-capitalist culture and finance in the real world. Conversely, my reading of *Lunar Park* (2005) as a late-capitalist hyper-gothic treatment of mortgage debt and the haunted house was primarily concerned with hyper-gothic spaces and the ways in which they both contain and embody the spectral nature of late-capitalist finance, with particular reference to the then-building subprime-mortgage scandal.[11] In this instance, late-capitalist hyper-gothic is evident in both the presence of Bret Easton Ellis as the main character of the novel itself, and in the literalisation of the haunting nature of debt as the haunted house, haunted bank vault, and the ghosts of labour that pursue Bret throughout the narrative. There are, of course, certain areas of crossover between the examination of hyper-gothic bodies and hyper-gothic spaces; indeed, for Bateman, the body is a space which can be explored as well as exploited, while the walls of Bret's house literally bleed, giving the impression that the house is composed of human parts. However, these previous studies also establish multiple other frameworks through which late-capitalist hyper-gothic can be examined and contextualised that are equally worthy of closer examination.

This article establishes a third framework in addition to hyper-gothic bodies and spaces: that of late-capitalist hyper-gothic adaptation. That Ellis's 1998 novel *Glamorama* takes substantial influence from Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* will not be a surprise to readers familiar with this less-publicised instalment of the Ellis canon. The novel focuses on a group of image-obsessed fashion models who, upon being inducted into an underground terrorist organisation, become subject to bodily mutilation, artificial doubling, and eventually, replacement by doppelgängers. Yet the presence of financial themes and motifs in the novel serves to re-categorise *Glamorama* as not merely a novel inspired by *Frankenstein*, but as a hyper-gothic adaptation of Shelley's novel that specifically articulates the contradictions, grotesquery, and hyperreality of late-capitalist finance. The article first examines the legacy of capitalist readings of *Frankenstein* and the ways in which *Glamorama*'s (and, by extension, Ellis's) focus on whiteness contributes to the novel's perverse adaptation of Shelley's narrative. It then establishes *Glamorama* as a specifically late-capitalist *Frankenstein* adaptation, noting both how the novel's focus on commercialised bodies and photographed body parts is a direct reworking of the Frankensteinian creation story, and how the trajectory of protagonist Victor embodies critical readings of doubling in Shelley's novel by merging Frankenstein and the Creature into a single, emotionally fractured character. Finally, it analyses the financial aspects

[11] Bride, 'Re/possessed', pp. 41-45.

of *Glamorama* in order to demonstrate the ways in which these aspects accelerate the gothic effect of Ellis's text to the point of establishing hyperreality. As such, the article not only furthers my existing research on hyper-gothic bodies and spaces – both of which are integral to a reading of *Glamorama* – but also demonstrates how this late-capitalist context also affects narrative, canon, and genre itself, with the hyper-gothic adaptation of classic gothic texts complying with Baudrillard's theory regarding the indefinite replication of hyperreality.

Market Monsters: *Frankenstein* and Capitalism

While Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been read as variously signifying the dangers of scientific inquiry, the act of playing God, a morbid interest in the viscerally of the body, what it means to be human, the fragility of masculinity, and the potential pliability of death, a key element of the narrative is rooted in fundamental capitalist principles. Frankenstein's creation of the Creature from body parts sourced from 'among the unhallowed damps of the grave' and 'collected bones from charnel-houses' implicates Shelley's scientist in body-snatching, a common practice employed by early surgeons and medical practitioners to source subjects for dissection that were not otherwise legally available.[12] While the illegality of body snatching automatically designates the practice culturally as participating in a 'black market' or 'black economy', the phenomenon was also an actual functioning economy that mirrored a number of key aspects of the contemporary market. The very fact the surgical community required more corpses than were legally available immediately presents an issue of supply and demand, leading surgeons to consorting with body snatchers or becoming body snatchers themselves, work which had to be completed on a seasonal basis. As Daina Ramey Berry notes,

> Fall weather proved ideal for the domestic cadaver trade and for grave digging, before frozen ground revealed snow-tracked footsteps and such work became nearly impossible. Brisk fall nights offered suitable temperatures for preserving corpses; the summer months were challenging because hot weather sped up decomposition. Thus, most bodies were stolen, sold, and prepared for dissection during cooler months. Anatomy demonstrations that involved dissections often occurred during the winter and concluded at the onset of spring.[13]

The presence of a peak season of grave robbing meant that stolen cadavers were valued differently depending on what stage of the market cycle they are acquired in, with bodies that would last longer or were harder to get more expensive than those easily acquired with a shorter

[12] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 3rd edn (Wordsworth, 1831), p. 43.
[13] Diana Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Beacon Press, 2017), pp. 154-55.

lifespan. This principle still exists within modern capitalism on everything from train tickets to company shares; if you buy early when supply is high and demand is low, you get a much better deal than if the circumstances were reversed. This is in addition to the fact that different cadavers held different capital values in their own right. Bodies with particular conditions or deformities were deemed more valuable due to their rarity, and the bodies of the wealthy and upper classes were riskier to acquire, and were therefore more expensive to buy.[14]

There was also an element of insider trading in this market, outside of the pun that these surgeons were literally purchasing access to the insides of human bodies. Competition for corpses between different medical schools, and therefore different body-snatching gangs, was fierce, meaning that surgeons relied heavily on tips from grave diggers and cemetery guards regarding where and when fresh bodies would be available.[15] In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein's use of individual body parts from an unspecified number of corpses sees him disassemble otherwise highly valuable whole corpses and, we assume, disregard the 'surplus' pieces in the hope that the one body part he has taken will, eventually, prove far more valuable to him than if it had stayed part of the discarded body. This is, in essence, asset stripping, with an additional element of commodity fetishism evident through the selection of body parts based on aesthetic rather than function, clear in Frankenstein's selection of beautiful parts for the Creature.[16] As such, the underlying premise of Frankenstein's creation of the Creature – the fact that he is constructed from multiple, illegally sourced corpses – is grounded in capitalist practices, cycles, and value systems. Scholarly readings of the Creature as representing the proletariat labouring classes, unions, and corporate bodies further underline the conceptual and critical connections between *Frankenstein* and capitalism.[17]

This relationship becomes complicated and explicitly racialised when considered in light of the American reception to Shelley's novel. Utilised by white supremacists to 'justify' the continued enslavement of African Americans, the Creature's rebellion against his creator and 'master' was received in the US as a metaphoric warning against insurrection, with Nat Turner's Rebellion occurring in 1831, the same year that the third edition of *Frankenstein* was published. The racial coding of Frankenstein's Creature as African American quickly became a cultural shorthand for the supposed sub-humanity of Black peoples and, during the Jim Crow

[14] Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, p. 167.
[15] Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, p. 153.
[16] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 45.
[17] See Paul O'Flinn, 'Production and Reproduction: The Case of *Frankenstein*', in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. by Mark Jancovich (Routledge, 2001), pp. 194-213; and I. Maurice Wormser, *Frankenstein, Incorporated* (McGraw-Hill, 1931).

era, culminated in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) in which Boris Karloff's 'Monster' is dark-skinned, a victim of the racist pseudoscience phrenology, and ultimately subjected to a lynching marked by a burning cross atop a hillside populated by an angry white mob.[18] This is in addition to the fact that the US 'domestic cadaver trade' – to borrow Berry's term for the buying and selling of snatched bodies for medical anatomisation – was largely fulfilled by the stolen corpses of enslaved peoples, meaning that if Frankenstein had created his Creature on US soil, the body parts used would more than likely have come from Black cadavers.[19] In characterising the Creature as African American (and, by extension, African Americans as monstrous), the US interpretation of Shelley's narrative extends the original novel's links with capitalism to include the history and legacy of the slave trade, as well as the American precedent of using Black peoples (living and dead) as dissection subjects, involuntary tissue donors, and medical experiments.[20] The American 'Black Frankenstein' narrative is thus especially capitalistic, with its implicit references to real-life biocapitalist markets in body parts, as well as chattel markets in enslaved bodies, casting the Frankensteinian scientist as a symbol of white supremacy, racial abuse, and medical violence.[21]

Recognition of this overlap between race and capitalism in American recastings of Shelley's *Frankenstein* subsequently raises questions regarding the whiteness of Ellis's writing, and *Glamorama* in particular. As a figure in the public eye, Ellis is notoriously anti-diversity. *White*, his first non-fiction text covering the frustration of being a white man who is criticised for making public jokes about HIV, was published in 2016.[22] February 2019 saw him argue that *Black Panther* (2018) was wrongly nominated for an Oscar purely to meet diversity quotas.[23] In April 2019, he told Cathy Newman of Channel 4 News that he, as a white man, is more susceptible to Twitter abuse than Black women because he does not get a 'free pass' online.[24] As a writer, Ellis's novels, including *Glamorama,* are overwhelmingly biased towards white

[18] Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Monster* (New York University Press, 2008), p. 177; *Frankenstein*, dir. by James Whale (Universal, 1931).
[19] Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, p. 3.
[20] See Dr James Marion Simm's gynaecological experiments (1845-49); the creation of the HeLa cell line using tissue stolen from Henrietta Lacks (1951); and 'The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male' (1932-72).
[21] Young, *Black Frankenstein*, p. 5.
[22] Bret Easton Ellis, *White* (Picador, 2016).
[23] *Black Panther*, dir. By Ryan Coogler (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018); Tim Molloy, 'Bret Easton Ellis Questions "Black Panther" Oscar Nomination for Best Picture: "Does It Really Deserve One?"', *The Wrap*, 1 February 2019 <https://www.thewrap.com/bret-easton-ellis-questions-black-panther-oscar-nomination-for-best-picture-does-it-really-deserve-one/> [accessed 14 September 2022].
[24] Cathy Newman, 'Bret Easton Ellis on Donald Trump: "I Don't Let Myself Get Trumped by His Existence"', *Channel 4 News*, 23 April 2019 <https://www.channel4.com/news/bret-easton-ellis-on-donald-trump-i-dont-let-myself-get-trumped-by-his-existence> [accessed 14 September 2022].

characters and experiences, with characters of colour only featuring as periphery victims of violence, as in *American Psycho*, if they are included at all.[25] While some might attempt to dismiss this as the product of a bigoted author working within a late twentieth-century literary marketplace in which diversity and representation were not priorities, *Glamorama*'s focus on whiteness becomes especially insidious in light of the novel's adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Ellis's white protagonist, Victor Ward – whose name merges those of two earlier literary mad scientists, Victor Frankenstein and Charles Dexter Ward – occupies the role of both Frankenstein and Creature throughout the novel.[26] Not only does he participate in the (conceptual) dismemberment and reconstruction of idealised bodies by way of his obsession with fashion photographs, image retouching, and plastic surgery, but Victor is also a fragmented, ostracised, and paternally neglected figure who is subjected to bodily experimentation and mutilation at the hands of the terrorist gang that he joins, and by whom he is later replicated.

In having Victor embody both characters, Ellis performs an act of literary whitewashing that sees the racialised violence of body snatching and medical experimentation that informs American revisions of *Frankenstein* dressed up and repackaged as the lucrative, fashionable, and voluntary modification of white bodies through plastic surgery and photographical editing. While there is, admittedly, a certain shared viscerality and crossover between surgical dissection and surgical modification – as evidenced in later Frankensteinian works such as *American Mary* (2012), whose underground body modification surgeries see her, in one instance, swapping the limbs and brain pieces of identical twins – Ellis's characterisation of Victor in the role of the Creature as well as the scientist creates a problematic pairing that is at best jarring, and at worst offensive.[27] The implication is that Victor, as a rich, white celebrity, has reason to believe that society does not see him as human, an extraordinary idea given his obvious position of privilege and influence, as well as his frequent dehumanisation of others. Victor's supposed victimhood through his performance of the role of the Creature is then

[25] See Patrick Bateman's murder of a transient African American man, and Bateman's screaming at a Chinese dry cleaner in chapters 'Dry Cleaners' and 'Tuesday' in Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (Picador, 1991).
[26] H. P. Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* was posthumously published in *Weird Tales* in 1941, and sees the eponymous protagonist experiment with alchemy and occultism in order to resurrect his doppelgänger ancestor from death. Over the course of *Glamorama*, Victor Ward (formerly Johnson) realises he has a doppelgänger, referred to as Victor Johnson, who eventually takes over his life and career. The novel's focus on Victor Ward as the protagonist implies that he is the original identity who has been duplicated since changing his name. However, given Victor Johnson's appearance in Ellis's earlier novel *The Rules of Attraction* (Simon & Schuster, 1987), it is possible to interpret Victor Ward as the unwitting doppelgänger of the original Victor Johnson.
[27] *American Mary*, dir. by Jen and Sylvia Soska (Universal, 2012).

awkwardly juxtaposed with his occupation of the Frankenstein role, which automatically places Victor in a position of power, and specifically one which is guilty of inflicting the kind of dehumanising harm that Victor complains about experiencing himself. This is also in contrast to the abused and enslaved African Americans signified by earlier American Frankensteinian texts, who were literally classified as chattel and treated as working animals in US law and culture.[28] The result of this implication is an outrageous proposed equivalence between the enforced suffering of disenfranchised African Americans and the commercialised vanity of Victor Ward, whose body modification actively increases his earning potential, and allows him greater opportunity to objectify and disenfranchise others.

It is also important to note that, unlike other iterations of the *Frankenstein* narrative, Victor, in the role of the Creature, is not a labouring body – as seen in readings of Shelley's Creature as representing the working class, Whale's Monster as reviving the bodies of enslaved African Americans, and even comedy remake *Frankenhooker* (1990), which places the animated bodies of dead sex workers in the Creature role.[29] Instead, Victor is a signifier of financial value whose image, rather than use value, generates profit through pure existence rather than applied utility. Indeed, Victor does not perform any physical or productive work or service at any point in the novel, and even struggles to secure jobs as a fashion model. His capital wealth and cultural influence are thus based on value that is intangible rather than material; he is simply deemed valuable because of who he is rather than anything he does. This coincides with the late-capitalist publication of *Glamorama* during a time when financialisation and commodity fetishism were rife. As such, the particular speculative form that Victor-as-Creature takes in *Glamorama* can be read as reflective of the increasing intangibility of the financial environment against which the action of the novel is set.

It might be possible for readers unfamiliar with Ellis as a public figure to read his offering of a white, affluent, vacuous, and financialised version of Frankenstein's Creature ironically as a critique of postmodern commercialisation and the prioritisation of wealth, status, and material goods over human welfare in the late twentieth century. From this (frankly, generous) perspective, one might understand *Glamorama* as a postmodern and self-depreciating treatise of the complicity of the American capitalist system in the ongoing abuses of African American peoples via incarcerated labour, employment biases, educational inequality, financial prejudice, and gentrification. However, given Ellis's politics, public

[28] Berry, *Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, p. 12.
[29] *Frankenhooker*, dir. by Frank Henenlotter (Levins-Henenlotter/Shapiro-Glickenhaus Entertainment, 1990).

declarations, and literary record, it seems far more likely that the crisis imbedded within *Glamorama*'s whiteness is a dystopian vision of how bad things would be if white bodies were subject to physical and financial abuse *instead of* Black bodies. In this reading, Victor's wealth and status do not function to accentuate his already-privileged position, but rather act as signifiers pointing to the fact that Victor does not deserve to be mutilated; they therefore serve to emphasise the tragic nature of his demise as a rich white man. In a perverse pre-echo of 'All Lives Matter', *Glamorama* appears to highlight the horrific idea that wealthy white people can be dissected by mad scientists, too.

Why then bother with a racially prejudiced, socially un-critical novel from the late-1990s that is as little read as it is seldom studied? While it would be incredibly easy to dismiss *Glamorama* and Ellis more generally as a relic of a bygone and best-forgotten branch of American literature, the novel's specifically financial treatment of *Frankenstein*, and its subsequent creation of narrative hyperreality, does nonetheless offer something valuable to the contemporary reader. As previously mentioned, our current, perhaps ultra-hyper moment (in which pandemic vaccines are distributed according to national wealth, confectionary giant Nestlé is allowed to buy and siphon off residential water supplies, and some of the richest and most problematic corporate leaders on the planet are competing in a privatised space race) owes much to the preceding decades, yet is benevolently contextualised by the characterisation of the late-twentieth-century as 'hyper'. There is thus a significant advantage to be gained by examining this frightening trajectory from late capitalism to what would be post-late capitalism or similar. Moreover, contemporary social developments including the rise of the new Far Right, the Trump administration, the Black Lives Matter movement, and most recently, the death of Queen Elizabeth II – whose passing has been marked by a rise in voices condemning numerous colonial atrocities committed under her rule – have made the critique of whiteness, white supremacy, and whitewashing ever more vital.[30] As Taylor Nygaard and Jorie Lagerwey outline in *Horrible White People* (2021) '*seeing* those structures [of white supremacy] is important'.[31] Nygaard and Lagerwey's volume, which critiques the prevalence of performatively liberal, white-focused romantic-comedy television series of the 2010s, argues that

[30] See Caroline Kimeu, '"A Brutal Legacy": Queen's Death Met with Anger as Well as Grief in Kenya', *The Guardian*, 12 September 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/12/queen-death-kenya-colonial-rule-mau-mau-uprising> [accessed 14 September 2022]

[31] Taylor Nygaard and Jorie Lagerwey, *Horrible White People: Gender, Genre, and Television's Precarious Whiteness* (New York University Press, 2021), p. 31, emphasis in original.

> Representational media, then, work to sustain cultural norms and maintain or even create the ideological structures in which we live. […] These cultural structures – repeated patterns of representation – run parallel to the economic structures (for just one example) that keep people of color with less access to home ownership and intergenerational wealth accumulation than is available to White Americans.[32]

Ellis's whitewashing of the American Frankenstein narrative, and subsequent erasure of Black suffering in favour of spotlighting the *speculative* suffering of rich white celebrities, similarly creates an ideological structure that does indeed run parallel with the economic (and financial) structures of the time, and as such demands critical attention lest we fail to recognise the ways in which these structures prevail by feeding off of each other. Just as the 'Horrible White People shows' examined by Nygaard and Lagerwey promise to reveal the left's complicity in the cultural maintenance of white supremacy, *Glamorama* offers a chance to examine how the American Frankenstein narrative can be used as a tool to critique dangerous social and financial structures at the same time that the novel itself appears to promote these same structures.[33]

Gothicising the Model Body: *Glamorama* as *Frankenstein*

While the remainder of this article is, fundamentally, concerned with hyper-gothic adaptation, the origins of its analysis of *Glamorama* as a Frankensteinian text are rooted in my earlier focus on hyper-gothic bodies. If, as previously mentioned, Patrick Bateman is understood as a vampire preying on commodified flesh, it then translates that Victor Ward, the fashion model protagonist of *Glamorama*, constitutes the kind of marketed body that Bateman feeds upon. Bateman does feature briefly in *Glamorama*, aptly described 'with weird stains on the lapel of his Armani suit', implying blood, semen, or even excrement.[34] Victor is also followed throughout the novel by someone he believes to be Christian Bale, who is, given his role in Mary Harron's 2000 adaptation of *American Psycho*, coincidentally the cinematic and public face of Bateman's vampirism: 'in a mirrored wall I immediately spot the Christian Bale-looking guy who followed me into Masako yesterday standing next to me'.[35] That Victor sees the Bale look-a-like in a mirror but is unable to determine his true identity again recalls the duality of Bateman's gothic identity and indicates that, in both public and monstrous forms, Victor and his model contemporaries are indeed stalked by Bateman as the commodity-vampire. This

[32] Nygaard and Lagerwey, *Horrible White People*, p. 31.
[33] Nygaard and Lagerwey give a number of examples of what they define as 'Horrible White People shows', including *Girls* (HBO, 2012-17), *Girlfriends' Guide to Divorce* (Bravo, 2014-18), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix, 2015-19), *Fleabag* (BBC Three; Amazon, 2016-19), *I Love Dick* (Amazon, 2016-17), *Big Little Lies* (HBO, 2017-19), and *Russian Doll* (Netflix, 2019 – present).
[34] Ellis, *Glamorama* (Picador, 1998), p. 38.
[35] *American Psycho*, dir. by Mary Harron (Lion Gate Films, 2000); Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 276.

already implies an element of hyperreality as the real world of the reader – in which Christian Bale really does exist – and the fictional world of *American Psycho*, emerge as one within the equally fictional world of *Glamorama*.

In this context, the model body in *Glamorama* becomes meat for consumption; this is evident in the novel's emphasis on the physical bodies – rather than personalities – of each character. Georgina Colby argues that the prolificacy and ubiquity of the fashion photograph in the novel, as a literally depthless representation of the human body or, more commonly, individual body parts, presents 'the model body as the fetishized image'.[36] The subsequent loss of personal subjectivity that results from the photograph's surface representation of otherwise anonymous body parts means that fashion photography 'becomes a medium of pure objectivity' by which the human body becomes a dismembered, commodified shell.[37] Furthermore, that the 'real' models are, in the public eye, preceded by their celebrity identities – constructed from the objectified body parts captured and circulated by the fashion photograph – means that, when met in person, they appear as reconstructions of already familiar but separate parts. The act of posing for the picture, read by Roland Bathes as 'reproducing oneself […] transform[ing] myself in advance into an image', then shows the model body as a temporarily reconstructed whole, before becoming re-commodified as separate items on magazine covers and adverts.[38] In this way, the model body is one continuously caught in a process of assembly and deconstruction.

This constant reformation of the human body not only designates the characters of *Glamorama* as marketed commodities but additionally recalls the plight of the Creature of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Just as the Creature is created from body parts severed from numerous anonymous corpses, so too are the identities of Victor and other celebrity models reconstructed from various images of individual parts of their anatomy. As Victor describes, the walls of his manager JD's office are covered with 'photos of pecs and tanned abs and thighs and bone-white butts', thrown together along with 'an occasional face' to make a whole body from separate, anonymous, and dismembered items.[39] That Victor is unable to recognise himself amongst the parts on the wall because the pictures are 'always replaced' underlines his loss of identification with his own body, and demonstrates the intense mutilation and reproduction of the human

[36] Georgina Colby, 'Repressive Desublimation and the Great Refusal in Bret Easton Ellis's Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 26.2 (2012), pp. 319-45 (p. 336), doi:10.1080/0950236X.2011.602550.
[37] Colby, 'Repressive Desublimation', p. 336.
[38] Roland Bathes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (Vintage, 2000), p. 10.
[39] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 63.

body made possible by late-capitalist image fetishism.[40] By repeatedly replacing the photographs on the wall, JD creates a recurring cycle of dismemberment that produces an endless supply of parts with which to replicate Dr Frankenstein's construction of the Creature's body from separate fragments, albeit through a process that is voluntarily undertaken and that simultaneously actively generates profit for the bodies involved in the process. Ellis's positioning of these beautiful, privileged, and ultimately consenting fictional bodies as victims of Frankensteinian mutilation via fashion photography is thus immediately problematic in its implied equivalence to the enforced dissection of actual African American bodies for the capital benefit of their abusers, while also presenting the beautiful and culturally valuable population of model bodies of *Glamorama* as an exclusively Caucasian community, evident in the specifically 'bone-white' body parts on display.

Crucially, the fact that 'all the guys [on JD's office wall] are so similar-looking it's getting tougher and tougher to tell them apart' translates as a gothic production line from which Frankenstein's Creature can be mass produced.[41] The fashion photograph, in reproducing parts of the model body, so commodified that all versions look the same, enables a Fordist revision of Shelley's text in which the gothic monster is created – and can be infinitely recreated – via photographical dismemberment. Not only does *Glamorama* exaggerate Frankenstein's construction of the Creature from body parts specifically selected for their beauty by reconstructing the monstrous body from literal fashion models; it also literalises Baudrillard's theory regarding the reproduction of hyperrealities by making the monster body indefinitely reproducible at the expense of anything subjective or 'real'. As Colby recognises, 'there is a parallel here between the acceleration of reproduction/replacement and the erasure of identity'.[42] The lack of confirmed identity experienced by Frankenstein's nameless Creature is heightened by the late-capitalist context of *Glamorama* in that the constructed body is so quickly replaced, and any potential for individuality is immediately lost. The reconstructed model body is, in Ellis's text, nothing more than one in a series of mass-produced commodities. JD's office is thus reminiscent of the 'dissecting room' and 'slaughter house' from which Shelley's Victor Frankenstein harvests his materials in order to create the Creature.[43]

This commodification and re-commodification of the model body in order to achieve the perfect image creates an iconicity so extreme that even the models themselves are unable

[40] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 63.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Georgina Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis: Underwriting the Contemporary* (Macmillan, 2011), p. 105.
[43] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 37.

to live up to their own image. Throughout *Glamorama*, celebrities are told that they look like themselves without being accepted as themselves, to the point where fellow model Chloe seeks confirmation from others that she looks like her own image: 'somebody came up to me and said, "Oh, you look just like Chloe Byrnes." […] And I said "Oh? Really?"'[44] The models of *Glamorama* are then gothic doppelgängers of their own photographed image, whose wellbeing is seemingly dependent upon their continued recognisability. Angela Woods argues that Victor's lack of coherent self-definition and fragmented identity make him fit the profile of the 'postmodern schizophrenic', supporting this reading of gothic doubling and split personas within the novel.[45] Unable to conceive himself as whole due to the pictorial fragmentation of his physical body through the fashion photograph, Victor is subsequently unable to relate to images of himself in a way that confirms his identity. Instead, he buys his own image as a consumer rather than possessor of his persona: 'passing a newsstand by the new Gap, I notice I'm still on the cover of the current issue of *YouthQuake*, looking pretty cool […] and I've just got to buy another copy'.[46] Victor covets the magazine as though it were showing someone else, demonstrating his disconnection from his commodified identity and therefore indicating an unresolved duality within his character. That Woods attributes this schizophrenic split in Victor to his overexposure to 'the sensory stimuli of postmodernity' further highlights the effect of late-capitalist image culture and the marketed body on the unity and stability of the self.[47] Victor is, like the other models of the novel, a gothic double specifically because of his position within the commodified culture of late capitalism, at the same time that he is only able to reconcile his fragmentation through engagement with late capitalism.

Victor is thus a *Frankenstein*-esque gothic monster reassembled from his own commodified body parts through the fashion photograph, while at the same time experiencing an uncanny alienation from this reconstructed self, and subsequently trapped in a cycle of commodification and consumption in which he must buy his own fragmented image in order to quell his feelings of fragmentation. Like the Creature, who is both a – literal – product of the human race and socially outcast from it, Victor's media-constructed personality is denied access to the 'Real World', the implied pun on the MTV programme of the same name – which is referenced throughout the novel and shown to be highly scripted–becoming true by the end

[44] Ellis, *Glamorama*, pp. 37-38.
[45] Angela Woods, '"I am the Fucking Reaper": *Glamorama*, Schizophrenia, Terrorism', *Colloquy*, 8.1-9 (2004), n. p., doi:10.4225/03/591c322899f1f <https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/journal_contribution/_I_am_the_fucking_reaper_Glamorama_Schizophrenia_Terrorism/4955303/1> [accessed 20 May 2024].
[46] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 19.
[47] Woods, '"I am the Fucking Reaper"'.

of the novel when he is outcast from his own life.[48] Victor also partakes in the commodification of the bodies of others through visual means; he therefore also performs the role of Victor Frankenstein – conveniently, given their shared first name – alongside that of the Creature as a constructed identity. His description of fellow model Lauren Hynde as 'thin with full breasts, long and shapely legs, short blond hair, everything else – eyes, teeth, lips, whatever – equally nice' reduces her to a catalogue of body parts.[49] Victor's deconstructive gaze, directed towards Lauren and others, subsequently undermines his own fears regarding bodily fragmentation, as he is revealed to be a perpetrator of the visual violence he himself detests. The hypocrisy at play here speaks back to Ellis's whitewashing of the American Frankenstein narrative and the novel's overall presentation of horror as derived from the possibility of specifically white bodily mutilation. Just as Victor is horrified at his own objectification and yet content to objectify others (and compelled to continue to objectify himself), *Glamorama* as a whole appears aghast at the idea that white bodies could become the subjects of dissection and experimentation, while saying nothing about the very real history of Black bodily abuse, and the continued capitalist profit derived from such atrocities.[50]

Furthermore, as a witness to the dissection of fellow model Sam Ho, Victor experiences and partakes in the mutilation of the model body prior to reconstruction from an objective point of view:

> a mannequin made from wax covered in either oil or Vaseline, slathered with it, lies twisted on its back in some kind of horrible position on a steel examination table […] Bruce nods grimly and moves his hand to a lever, pressing it, causing lights to flicker, and in a flash my eyes move from the wires connected to the box over to where they have actually been inserted into gashes and cuts on what I'm just realizing are the mannequin's nipples, fingers, testicles, ears.[51]

The scene acts as a reversal of Todd Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*, in which a beautiful trapeze performer is forcibly transformed into a 'human-duck' complete with bill, reduced stature, unnaturally bent legs, webbed feet, and permanent feathers.[52] Whereas Browning's creation of body horror relies on turning beauty into grotesquery, Ellis's body horror sees the beautiful

[48] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 24.
[49] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 84.
[50] See, for example, Thermo Fisher Scientific, a biotech company who continue to profit from products derived from the cells stolen from Henrietta Lacks by Johns Hopkins University in 1951. See Jenna Greene, 'Henrietta Lacks' Heirs Sue for Cut of Medical Research Profits. Are They Too Late?', *Reuters*, 12 April 2022 <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/henrietta-lacks-heirs-sue-cut-medical-research-profits-are-they-too-late-2022-04-12/> [accessed 2 October 2022].
[51] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 283.
[52] *Freaks*, dir. by Tod Browning (Universal, 1932).

artificially recreated, underlining the self-referentiality inherent within both the novel's model community. As Colby argues, the use of medical language – such as 'scrotum' and 'anus' – to describe the mannequin later revealed to be Sam Ho underlines the corporeality of the body on the table, in contrast to the 'dehumanized body parts montaged on the walls of JD's office'.[53] From Victor's perspective, this scene literally shows the inanimate body brought to life; the mannequin is made human, a collection of disconnected 'legs', 'arms', 'fingers', and 'ears' brought together to make a recognisable identity in Sam Ho. This, along with the laboratory setting complete with chained table, ceiling hoists, and electrical equipment, mirrors the 'apparatuses, tubes, vials and wires of laboratory labor' that Fred Botting highlights as culturally associated with the creation of Frankenstein's Creature.[54] Although not specifically mentioned in Shelley's text, the use of a lever to send an electrical current through Sam Ho to bring him to life further recalls numerous Hollywood interpretations of *Frankenstein* in which the Monster is revived by electric shock or lightning bolt. Hidden from society in a below-ground, dimly lit, and brick-lined corridor reminiscent of the gothic castle, the soundproofed fitness room-turned-laboratory sees the dismemberment of the model body via the fashion photograph literalised. The 'violability of the human body' articulated by Shelley's text is thus made graphically clear for both Victor and the reader.[55]

Victor's subsequent fear of replacement and belief that he has a doppelgänger then becomes further evidence of the commodification of the model body and of the gothic in *Glamorama*. Aside from the more obvious references to doubling that surface throughout the novel – a bar called 'Doppelgangers', a band called 'The Impersonators', songs called 'We're the Same' and 'Substitute' – Victor is repeatedly 'seen' in places he does not remember going, in some instances being photographed at events he denies ever attending: 'there are eight photographs of me. Two were taken backstage at what looks like a Wallflowers concert […] I've never been to a Wallflowers concert.'[56] What thus becomes clear following the dissection of Sam Ho – or more specifically, what is revealed as the body of 'the actor playing Sam Ho' – is the ability to manipulate and rearrange the model body to such an extent that an additional body is created alongside the original.[57] That the nameless actor playing the part of Sam Ho is convincing enough to fool Victor and others indicates how successfully the model body is

[53] Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis*, p. 112; and Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 283.
[54] Botting, 'Metaphors and Monsters', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 7.4 (2003) pp. 339-65 (p.341), doi 10.1080/1479758032000165020.
[55] Botting, p. 341.
[56] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 6, p. 90, p. 104, p. 303, and pp. 224-25.
[57] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 333.

replicated and thus its susceptibility to being doubled. It is subsequently clear that Victor appears to be in two places at once because an identical doppelgänger has assumed his persona elsewhere. That Victor answers to both 'Victor Ward' and 'Victor Johnson' aligns him with Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, as well as Dr Frankenstein and the Creature, and exemplifies him as a classically gothic split identity.

The key factor in this particular allusion is that, rather than being doubled by a sinister, more hideous, and even animalistic alternative identity, as is explored in both Stevenson's 1886 novella and in the 1931 film adaptation (in which Mr Hyde's appearance is distinctly ape-like), *Glamorama* sees Victor doubled by an equally attractive and indeed more sociable version of himself that appears as an improvement on the original.[58] Reflecting his pet phrase, Victor is haunted by a literal 'spare me', an additional or surplus Victor that, in being photographed and recognised as Victor in magazines and social circles, designates the 'original' Victor as the '"spare" in the science fiction formula, the spare body of the cloned subject'.[59] That both the original and doppelgänger Victors operate as spares in this context distorts any legitimate claim made by either on the identity of Victor Ward, again signifying the gothic nature of this identity as it becomes spectrally illusive through the process of doubling.

This relationship between Victor and his other self also echoes the doubling inherent between Shelley's Frankenstein and the Creature. Whether Frankenstein is read as the Creature's father, master, nemesis, God-like creator, stifled lover, or alter ego, it is clear that each character functions as a foil for the other in Shelley's novel. The fact that the Creature is frequently misidentified as 'Frankenstein' in popular culture demonstrates a similar dissolution of identity as a result of doubling that Victor experiences in *Glamorama*. Moreover, the fact that the Creature is created from an unnatural combination of multiple individual bodies further implies that, in creating a dark double of himself, Frankenstein has not only erased the identities of the original owners of each body part but created a new identity that is, itself, a mere refraction of those combined identities, rather than constituting an individual subject in its own right. The Creature is, after all, more than the sum of his parts and therefore a separate entity beyond the former identities that were linked to his various body parts, and also a direct product of those former identities that perversely brings at least some elements of those former bodies back to life. The idea that doubling and doppelgängers, rather than increasing subjective power and influence through multiplication, actually dilute the subjective experience is thus a

[58] *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, dir. by Rouben Mamoulian (Paramount Pictures, 1931).
[59] Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis*, p. 115.

fundamental tenant of both *Frankenstein* and *Glamorama*, albeit modernised in the latter through the lens of popular media and celebrity culture, in which achieving uniformity through conformity is presented as desirable.

This is in addition to Victor's chasing of his own double, and the implied eventual demise of Victor Ward, which recall the cat-and-mouse chase that concludes Shelley's novel, and sees man and monster chase each other from South America to the Arctic and beyond. The crimes that Victor and his double commit during *Glamorama*'s re-enactment of this chase, including supporting suicide bombings in major cities across Europe, mirror the murders committed by the Creature and covered up by Frankenstein over the course of Shelley's novel. Moreover, the fact that multiple narrative perspectives in *Glamorama*, including both versions of Victor, the 'director' of the film crew that follows Victor around, the leader of the terrorist network, and the public viewership of Victor's actions and productions, mimic the multi-layered epistolary narration of *Frankenstein* in which the experiences of each character are contained within the narrative of someone else. As such, *Glamorama* operates as a twentieth-century reworking of *Frankenstein* in which the monstrous dismemberment, reconstruction, and fetishisation of bodies and body parts in order to create monstrous beings is translated as the postmodern obsession with celebrity culture and body modification, in which every body is its own double through the proliferation of fashion photography and reality TV, in addition to the artificial replication of models by identical actors who later turn out to be terrorists. The explicit whiteness of these models and doppelgängers, and the fact that the novel completely glosses over the devastating impact of their terrorist actions, serves to refocus the traditional parameters of the American Frankenstein narrative away from the commodified victims of violence and onto the experiences of those who have the power, means, and inclination to hurt others for profit. As such, Ellis's late-capitalist revision of *Frankenstein* operates along a dangerous trajectory in which the reader is invited to identify with, root for, and ultimately feel sorry over the white inflictors of violence, while simultaneously forgetting the real legacy of Black suffering.

Terror and the Derivative: *Glamorama* as Late-Capitalist Hyper-Gothic

While it is thus clear that *Glamorama* operates as a late-capitalist *Frankenstein* adaptation, the relevance of late capitalism to the novel extends beyond context, modernisation, and racial bias. Rather, as a specifically hyper-gothic adaptation, *Glamorama* stands as a *Frankenstein* revision in which late-capitalist finance performs a particular and central role in the characterisation of Victor as both Frankenstein and the Creature. This role becomes evident

through a closer examination of the existence of Victor's double who, as an identical copy of a persona that is itself unnaturally constructed from anonymous photographic body parts, personifies Plato's concept of the simulacrum that is, in Jameson's words, 'the identical copy for which no original has ever existed'.[60] Jameson argues that the simulacrum comes into effect in societies where 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification'.[61] This then further classifies the self-discontinuity felt by Victor as a direct result of the intense commodification of the model body through the fashion photograph in late-capitalist culture, as this undermines the subjectivity of even his 'original' identity, which is then further diluted once the doppelgänger comes in play.

Furthermore, that Jameson attributes the presence of the simulacrum to a generalisation of exchange value reflects the replicability of the model body within Ellis's novel.[62] Victor's newly constructed doppelgänger is accepted as being of an equivalent exchange value to the original Victor, despite the fact that, as people, each has a very different outlook on life and are thus not equivalents at all. This is evident in the difference between the Victor who narrates the opening of the novel compared with the replicate Victor who narrates the end. Having previously been immersed in celebrity culture and the superficiality of the fashion world, the Victor shown at the end of the novel goes to law school, sees a spiritual advisor, and has moved away from his former social scene in an attempt to recover a sense of personal depth. He is, under his own admission, 'a different person now'.[63] Perceived by society as an improvement of the original Victor's character, this new, artificially created replica reads as a male equivalent of the eponymous figures in Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972), a novel about humanoid replacements that are 'manufactured reproduction[s] of an imaginary/mythical referent […] achieved through murder and replication'.[64] Just as Levin's Joanna Eberhart cannot empathise with her old way of life post-transformation, the new Victor is completely unable to identify as Victor Johnson when speaking with his agent Bill: '"I am fielding offers for Victor Johnson", Bill says. […] "Bill … I don't think …" I stop, figure out a way to break the news. "I'm not … That's not me."'[65] This indicates that Victor does not just have a doppelgänger but that the doppelgänger has, in an echo of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956 and 1978), taken the

[60] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1991), p. 18.
[61] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18, quoting from Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Rebel Press, 1967).
[62] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18.
[63] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 445.
[64] Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (Bloomsbury, 1972); Jessica Johnston and Cornelia Sears, '*The Stepford Wives* and the Technoscientific Imaginary', *Extrapolation*, 52.1 (2011) pp. 75-94 (p.75), doi:10.3828/extr.2011.52.1.5.
[65] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 455.

original Victor's place in his own life.[66] Despite the underlying differences between the old and new versions of Victor, they are, based on their superficial likeness, accepted as identical and thus exhibit an equivalent exchange value.

As seemingly equal replacements for the 'real' or 'original' commodified model body – in other words, Victor at the start of the novel – the clones in *Glamorama* parallel the financial derivative in their symbolic reference to an absent source of commodity value. As Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee note, 'the conventional definition of a derivative, as a financial instrument whose value derives from an underlying asset, actually says nothing about its basic character, content or contextualization'.[67] That Victor's doppelgänger is a completely different person but still accepted as the original due to their surface similarity mirrors the superficial quality of the derivative, its valuation based on an assumed equivalence without knowledge of its true character, and its purely symbolic reference to the commodity being traded. Just as Victor's doppelgänger is not really Victor but merely represents him in a context where the original Victor is absent, the derivative is symbolic of and therefore treated as the commodity without actually ever becoming or existing as the commodity itself. The value of the new Victor is thus in his reference to the old Victor – in other words, his representation of an existing identity that does not need to be present in order to be photographed and thus commodified.

This then implies that the derivative adheres to 'a perfect and transparent realisation of a mathematically defined type' that can then be traded in the same way regardless of the commodity it represents.[68] This type, both superficially perfect and insubstantial due to its transparency, mirrors the mass production of model doubles in *Glamorama*. The doppelgängers fit the generic definition of beauty perpetuated by the fashion world – and, additionally, look so much like each other that they cannot be told apart – while also being so unrepresentative of the characters they aim to replace that anyone who truly knew the original person would effectively see right through them. The notion that the assumed equivalency of the derivative to all possible commodities is 'so powerful that it absorbs the reality to which it refers' is articulated in Ellis's novel in the apparent dissolution of the original Victor, as the doppelgänger becomes further established as the new Victor.[69] Following a phone call to his sister during which Victor is confronted by his doppelgänger who states 'This is Victor Johnson' down the receiver, the original Victor states 'I'm disconnected' and later describes himself as 'faded away

[66] *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, dir. by Don Siegel (Allied Artists Pictures, 1956).
[67] Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 111.
[68] LiPuma and Lee, *Financial Derivatives*, pp. 107-08.
[69] LiPuma and Lee, p. 108.

and my image overlapped and dissolved into an image of myself'.[70] The doppelgänger, accepted as the original Victor by both the media and Victor's family, effectively sucks the life out of the 'real' Victor until he feels himself fading away, dissolving into a new, different, yet superficially identical image of himself. The lived reality of the original Victor Ward has, by the end of the novel, been absorbed and adopted by the doppelgänger Victor who refers to Victor's absent commodified model body as the derivative refers to the material commodity.

Once constructed then, the clones in *Glamorama* circulate amongst the marketed culture of late capitalism as terrorists. This horrific juxtaposition of extreme violence with extreme beauty has carried over into the new millennium, with Nicolas Winding Refn's 2016 film *The Neon Demon* showing high-end fashion models who stalk, attack, and eat each other in competition for the best modelling gigs.[71] While *The Neon Demon*'s characterisation of the cut-throat nature of the fashion industry as out-and-out cannibalism, paired with a number of hallucinatory scenes throughout the narrative, highlight the film as perhaps a post-millennial example of late-capitalist hyper-gothic, the violence presented is confined to the modelling community and therefore not globalised, as it is in Ellis's novel. In the context of *Glamorama*, the predetermined expiration date of the derivative contract translates as either the scheduled death of the model during a terrorist act, or the point at which the current version of that model identity is due to be replaced by an identical, constructed replicate. Read alongside Baudrillard's interpretation of death as the subject's loss of value, the death of the model-turned-terrorist doppelgängers of Ellis's novel, deriving their value from their reference to absent commodified bodies, is then an erasure of trading value.[72]

Furthermore, the timed self-destruction of the model terrorists as circulating commodities recalls Paul Crosthwaite's discussion of the Freudian 'death drive' in relation to market crises.[73] The death drive is, according to Sigmund Freud, a psychological compulsion that works against an individual's self-preservation or survival instinct, causing 'animate organisms to revert to an inanimate state'.[74] This is then a compulsion towards death – and therefore objectivity as a lifeless body – through self-destruction, itself a gothic concept reminiscent of *The Exorcist* (1971) in its implication of a threatening force encapsulated within

[70] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 476 and p. 481.
[71] *The Neon Demon*, dir. by Nicolas Winding Refn (Amazon Studios, 2016).
[72] Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (Sage Publications, 1993), p. 5.
[73] Paul Crosthwaite, 'Blood on the Trading Floor: Waste, Sacrifice, and Death in Financial Crises', *Angelaki*, 15.2 (2010), pp. 3-18 (p. 7), doi:10.1080/0969725X.2010.521380.
[74] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by John Reddik (Penguin, 2003) <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=LQcUz3FVkNQC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 20 May 2024].

the human body.[75] Crosthwaite applies this self-destructive drive to commodity trading, defining the death drive in specifically financial contexts as the market's apparent self-destruction, resulting in significant loss of value, which is then utilised in order to create equilibrium across exchanges.[76] For Crosthwaite, this economic death drive is part of the proposed self-correction of the efficient-market hypothesis, and is 'not simply a desire for the immediate destruction of life, but for the correct, appropriate, or fitting death, at the appointed time'.[77]

Crosthwaite's reading subsequently reinforces the definition of *Glamorama*'s models as dually commodified identities and contracts with planned expiry dates. The model terrorists of the novel, upon reaching their optimum value as derivative identities, execute the death drive that, in taking over rational self-preservation, causes them to kill themselves as part of a terrorist act. Their physical expiration through death translates as a simultaneously financial expiration through the loss of subjective value that sees the individual become an inanimate corpse. In turn, this loss creates a need to continuously reproduce *Frankenstein*-esque clones in order to maintain the supply of derivative doubles to the media market. The recreation of Frankenstein's Creature as a gothic double for an existing model thus becomes accelerated in line with supply and demand, the elevation of this process into something endlessly renewable and therefore without limits subsequently designating the doubling motif of *Glamorama* as hyper-gothic. The 'abstract symbolic violence' that results from derivative trading – the engendering of conditions that trigger social violence such as impoverishment as a result of speculation – is thus literalised in *Glamorama* as the threat of terrorism.[78] Baudrillard reads the ubiquity of terrorism in the postmodern age as turning modern cities into 'ghost towns, cities of death' that expand and replace the cemetery as a site of haunting.[79] If this is the case, the replacement of the traditionally gothic setting of the graveyard by the city as a whole, haunted by a constant yet invisible threat of terrorism performed by derivative model bodies, further demonstrates the exaggeration of the gothic within the novel. Just as the model doppelgänger can be endlessly reproduced to meet the demand of the market for terrorist-derivative identities, the expansion of the gothic onto a global scale indicates that, in the context of *Glamorama*, it can no longer be contained and has thus become extreme.

[75] *The Exorcist*, dir. by William Friedkin (Warner Bros., 1973).
[76] Crosthwaite, 'Blood on the Trading Floor', p. 7.
[77] Ibid.
[78] LiPuma and Lee, *Financial Derivatives*, p. 26.
[79] Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 127.

Furthermore, that these expanded gothic settings and the people who populate them are literally deconstructed by bombs disguised as branded items again demonstrates the loss of subjectivity and commodification of the human body as a result of the fashion industry and, by extension, late-capitalist image culture. The bomb that explodes in a Prada backpack outside Café Flore quickly transforms Brad from a 'he' into an 'it' upon his reduction from human whole to a series of anonymous body parts: 'the force of the first explosion propels Brad into the air. A leg is blown off from the thigh down and a ten-inch hole is ripped open in his abdomen and his mangled body ends up lying in the curb on Boulevard Saint-Germain, splashing around in its own blood.'[80] Brad and other victims are physically torn apart, their itemised body parts distributed across the street by the power of the Prada-branded bomb, in a distorted echo of the circulation of magazine adverts that only show part of the model body. In James Annesley's words, in 'bloodying up the Calvin Klein poster with Brad's splintered corpse, the bomb literalises consumption's reification of the human body'.[81]

However, the process of reification, of the abstract becoming concrete, is itself complicated by the novel's late-capitalist adaptation of *Frankenstein*. The deconstruction of the human body by both the fashion photograph and the terrorist actions of derivative models is, in one instance, reifying in the sense that the human body, in losing subjectivity, becomes objectified and thus a series of concrete items rather than a figurative identity. Conversely, this is also a transition from being a 'real' or complete person into a series of parts that signify without ever becoming the whole body, and are thus abstracted from that previously 'real' identity. The confusion here between subjective and abstract versions of the body again signifies the extreme commodification and ambiguous derivativeness of the constructed model clones. The point at which the body is classified as an original or 'real' as opposed to an 'unreal' derivative identity repeatedly evolves, depending on the perception of that body as a media- and/or physically constructed entity. This further demonstrates an overload in sources of the gothic uncanny that materialise in Victor's descriptions of the violence performed on Sam Ho. Before realising that the 'mannequin' on the examination table is actually human, Victor is 'shocked at how gruesome and inauthentic the waxwork looks'.[82] That, for Victor, the human body in front of him is unrealistic, compared to the staged and airbrushed photographs that he

[80] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 305.
[81] James Annesley, *Fictions of Globalization: Consumption, the Market, and the Contemporary American Novel* (Continuum, 2006), p. 31.
[82] Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 283.

interprets as reality, highlights the complete disillusion of the individual from the human body as a result of the intense circulation of fetishised images.

As Colby argues, 'the uncanny, in this instance, assumes the form of a mannequin turning human as opposed to the human becoming mannequin that is witnessed throughout *Glamorama* in the dehumanization of the characters'.[83] LiPuma and Lee's reading of derivative trading as refiguring relations between individuals into relations between things or items is thus literalised by Ellis, as Victor dually encounters what he believes to be mannequins animated to life and real people whom he treats as commodified objects.[84] This confusion between living and object bodies is also present in *The Neon Demon* and *American Mary*, with the former showing scene after scene of corpse-like models juxtaposed against actual corpses who are sexualised by one central protagonist as if they were alive. The latter shows medical student Mary perform illicit and illegal body modification surgeries on willing and non-willing clients alike, with many customers actively paying to be transformed into 'living dolls'. An ongoing concern with late-capitalist hyper-gothic may thus be an indeterminate, shifting, or completely broken boundary between living bodies – be they human or doll – and their dead equivalents, a further example of how the exploration of hyper-gothic adaptation is intimately entangled with the hyper-gothic body, as well with as the spaces in which those bodies operate (and are operated upon).

The hyper-gothic thus emerges through the continuously deconstructed and reassembled model body, made inanimate through photography and perpetually 'real' through an endless chain of replicates. In the late-capitalist culture of *Glamorama*, it is no longer possible to discern the difference between real-but-objectified individuals and abject-yet-animated mannequins. Furthermore, it is not only dead bodies that are brought back to life through Frankenstein-esque reconstruction; fake bodies are similarly revived, taking the place of formerly subjective identities in such a way that every character within *Glamorama* has the potential to be a gothic monster-doppelgänger. The source of horror within the novel is thus untraceable, unstoppable, and entirely ubiquitous as a result of the market for derivative identities, the endless potential for reproduction of the model clone, and the intense commodification of the human body to the point where it is no longer interpreted as real or authentic.

[83] Colby, 'Repressive Desublimation', p. 122.
[84] LiPuma and Lee, *Financial Derivatives*, p. 107.

This sequence of reproduction is also extended to the Frankensteinian narrative itself through its adaptation in the form of *Glamorama*. As a text, Ellis's novel extends the dehumanisation of the Creature beyond all conceivable limits, and colours elements of the reader's own world, including magazine images, as fragments of the gothic body, thereby merging the 'real' with the 'fictional' to the point of hyperreality. As a narrative, *Glamorama* creates a repeating Frankensteinian cycle in which Victor, as the Creature, later emulates Victor Frankenstein in order to create an additional monster, who will then, presumably, also later create further monsters in an unending chain of replicated, hyperreal bodies with no original. Equally, the release of the fashion-comedy franchise *Zoolander* (2001 and 2016) sees the emergence of Derek Zoolander as a potentially hyperreal adaptation of Victor Ward, indicating that *Glamorama*, as a hyperreal, hyper-gothic adaptation, will indeed go on to produce further hyperreal adaptations to the point where their reference to the original – in this instance, *Frankenstein* – becomes all but irrelevant.[85] As a result, *Glamorama* indicates the power of late-capitalist hyper-gothic, not only in terms of the extreme gothicisation of bodies, such as the Victors, and spaces, such as the underground laboratory and JD's office, but also in terms of gothic texts and narratives which, when combined with the referentiality of late-capitalist finance, become increasingly more extreme.

The subsequent recognition of *Glamorama* as late-capitalist hyper-gothic not only expands existing understandings of both financial fiction and the gothic, but also highlights the social and political biases inherent within the novel, which are themselves expressed through the gothic logic of *Frankenstein* and late-capitalist conceptualisations of value. In particular, in presenting the inclusion of white bodies into the biocapitalist system as extreme (in terms of both capitalism and the gothic), the novel ultimately implies that the previous (and ongoing) inclusion of Black bodies in the same system is, by comparison, normal. In the current age of increasing racial tension and fundamentalist revivalism, this is clearly a dangerous precedent to set, particularly given that much of Ellis's fictional work (along with that of his Generation-X contemporaries) is subject to a growing nostalgia movement currently focused on cultural productions of the 1980s and 90s.[86] As such, we are in danger of looking back at texts such as *Glamorama* with sentimental rather than critical eyes, and subsequently at risk of replicating

[85] *Zoolander*, dir. by Ben Stiller (Paramount Pictures, 2001); *Zoolander 2*, dir. by Ben Stiller (Paramount Pictures, 2016).

[86] See television, cinematic, and merchandise relaunches of Troll Dolls, My Little Pony, and Polly Pocket; renewed interest in Kate Bush and the wider *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-present) metaverse; the use of Transformers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and He-Man characters on Direct Line insurance adverts; and the continued success of 'Friendsfest', based on the American sitcom *Friends* (1995-2004).

the same harmful biases, unless these structures of systemic prejudice are brought out into the open and examined as the monsters that they are.