

Review: *Financial Gothic: Monsterized Capitalism in American Gothic Fiction*

by Amy Bride

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Amy Bride's *Financial Gothic: Monsterized Capitalism in American Gothic Fiction* investigates a previously unremarked tradition in American literature of representing finance as Gothic. Bride focuses on 'the prominence, popularity, and particularity of undead monsters—monsters that variously survive death, are revived from death, or else are constructed from dead body parts' to examine how Gothic fiction makes legible the complex financial mechanisms whose crises and failures determined the historical trajectory of the twentieth and twenty-first century (2). Of particular import is Bride's wider claim regarding the relationship between the Gothic nature of American finance and the legacy of the slave trade in both finance and Gothic literature. She positions her argument alongside the critical tradition of interpreting the American Gothic as preoccupied with race to contend 'that a critical recognition of the financial contexts of these works will act to illuminate the racial aspects of the Gothic genre even further' (3). Throughout the book, Bride balances the American Gothic's concern with finance and its reflection of the fictionality of finance with demonstrating the continuing interrelatedness of finance with the slave trade and the cultural presentation of Black bodies and lives as capitalized assets.

Bride structures her work around Giovanni Arrighi's 'systemic cycles of accumulation' across 'long centuries,' beginning with the 1929 stock market crash (20). Bride's first chapter analyzes Lovecraft's 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928) and James Whale's adaptation of *Frankenstein* (1931) as narratives that prefigure and react to the Wall Street Crash as an apocalyptic market event and contend with the Fourteenth Amendment's extension of legal personhood to both corporations and formerly enslaved people. She builds upon extant critical interpretations of the racial underpinnings of the American Frankenstein story to 'identify the combination and merging of race and finance as dually existent sources of fear in two majors monster narratives of the era,' demonstrating 'how this finance is reliant on the presence of racial monstrosity for its effect' (34). Her examination of specifically financial monstrosity in 'Cthulhu' establishes the basis for the chapter's more interesting intervention, in which Bride reads Whale's film as an exploration of early twentieth century 'body markets.' The many ways in which slave bodies—living or dead—acquire value separate from the labor they perform

'reveals a reading of *Frankenstein* (1931) that is embedded in the financialization of the enslaved body' (53).

The second chapter briefly diverges from Arrighi to explore the financial ramifications of World War II. Bride construes the spike in national debt and growing concerns about personal credit as negative entities that haunt the privilege of home ownership in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). '[I]n the age where home possession was promoted as the key to a substantial American citizenship, Jackson's Hill House is a spectral symbol of the mounting housing debt threatening the US economy in the post-war era' (76). By locating the source of haunting as the house itself, Bride argues, Jackson not only converts the haunted house into a spectral asset, but also highlights the construction of the 1950s housewife as 'equally susceptible to spectralization in the context of the consumer's republic' (77). Although Bride's analysis of the spectral imaginary of the housewife in both *Hill House* and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) provides useful insights into 'the pressures of domesticity that trigger madness,' this chapter lacks the readings of racialized finance that comprise the book's most dynamic interventions.

The third and fourth chapters examine the evolution of the vampire in American Gothic literature as reactive to contemporaneous financial crises. Deregulation increased the chasm between finance as a fictional concept and its material monetary underpinnings to produce the myth of unlimited consumption, as Bride argues in the third chapter, and late-capitalist hyperreality, as she explores in the fourth. Bride claims that the 'deregulated vampires' in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and *Fevre Dream* (1982) respond to the promise of apparently limitless liquidity, while the vampiric creatures of *The Lost Boys* (1987) and *American Psycho* (1991) run rampant to the point where vampires no longer need to hide their monstrosity from their victims. Bride returns in her third chapter to considerations of race to argue that the spatio-temporal settings of *Interview* and *Fevre Dream* demonstrate how contemporaneous financial deregulation replicates the deregulatory models of Southern plantation slavery, such that 'the enslaved person and the vampire victim are both drained of their liquidity by mass consumers looking to boost their own power in a hierarchical environment' (139). She elides readings of race in Schumacher and Ellis, but she convincingly posits a new mode of 'late-capitalist, hyper-Gothic' emerging from the juxtaposition of phantom financial structures with the materiality of modern life (181).

This observation about the material effects of phantom finance establishes the aperture for Bride's fifth chapter, her most compelling and tightly woven analysis of the symbiotic relationship between finance, the Gothic, and race. The post-apocalyptic narratives in *The*

Walking Dead (2003-19) and *Zone One* (2011) conceptually and structurally reflect the fragmentation of financial markets after the 2008 financial crash. The unchecked consumption of the previous chapters' vampires has left behind 'a horde of empty assets in the form of zombies that continue circulating despite their negative valuation within society, surviving beyond the point of zero existence usually constituted by death' (189). The strength of Bride's argument lies in her connections between the origins of zombie lore in Haitian slave histories, the practice of scapegoating Black subprime borrowers, and racialized representations of millennial zombies. Bride's reading of the subprime zombie cements the interwoven histories of contemporary finance and the slave trade in ways that are nuanced and truly masterful.

Financial Gothic reveals previously unexplored relationships between monstrosity, Gothic conventions, the immateriality of finance, and the history of the slave trade to highlight finance as both the source of fear and an influence on the depiction of monsters in the Long American Century. Bride's work promises significant applications across a wide swath of disciplines and contributes critical interventions about the repetition in contemporary financial markets of deregulatory crises of the antebellum slave trade. Opening several potential avenues for future attention on the historical reactivity of Gothic conventions, this book champions Gothic literature as uniquely situated for interrogating the fictions and realities that underly American anxieties.