Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.
( Abel Meeropol, “Strange Fruit” 5-8)

Zora Neale Hurston, a female black writer of the early twentieth century, is noticeable for depicting a side of the American nation that is most troubled and afflicted. In her works the American South acquires Gothic dimensions and becomes a site of terror and horror for its occupants. Using the Gothic for the portrayal of the South, Hurston’s endeavours towards representing the dreadfulness faced by the people of her race stand largely unrecognized and unexplored. She employs the ever-changing and fluid genre of the Gothic to put into words the lives of the rural Southern folk and in turn imparts to the genre of American Gothic a new definition. Benefitting from the tradition of slave narratives, Hurston chooses to use both realism and imagination to bring to light the perturbation associated with the troubled history that constituted the South.

Gothic literature when associated with the South assumes a different shape than its precedent - the European Gothic, as the American South is a region with a peculiar history. Owing to its atypical nature and distinctive character, the only genre of literature that can adequately and truly represent the South is the Gothic. The Gothic is a genre that is dynamic and acquires new forms with various geographical and sociological conditions. Hence we have the Canadian Gothic, South-Asian Gothic, Irish Gothic, Scottish Gothic, and the good old British Gothic (pertaining to geographical locations) and imperial Gothic, cyber Gothic, postcolonial Gothic, postfeminist Gothic (concerned with various socio-political phenomena). Something that emerges very clearly from these various categorizations is that the Gothic cannot be pinned down to a certain geographical region or few definite tenets. Hence Eric
Savoy’s assertion that “the Gothic is a fluid tendency rather than a concrete literary “mode”’ is quite valid here (Martin and Savoy 7). This is in accordance with what Catherine Spooner says about the scholars in the field of Gothic being Van Helsings, i.e., everybody tries to define and present the Gothic in myriad forms and manners. A free play of ideas and narratives define the Gothic with each writer putting forth new concerns and newer techniques of dealing with those concerns. Zora Neale Hurston belongs to this tradition of presenting the South in all its reality and horror. Through her works we come across the South as a land of beauty and horror, with horror being a significant aspect of life in the region. In fact, the horror and terror of everyday existence is so inherent in her works that she can be regarded as belonging to the category of writers like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O’Connor who use the Gothic mode to bring forth the dread associated with the South.

The present study seeks to establish Hurston as a literary forerunner of black female writers not only in the field of the African-American novel, but also in the African-American Gothic. Before Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) depicted the horrors of slavery and its after-effects, Hurston’s works established the Gothicism inherent in the black experience of slavery and its after-effects. The after-effects of slavery that find place in later black women writers such as Alice Walker and Gayl Jones i.e., sexual enslavement and gender violence, could find a place in Hurston’s oeuvre as well. The depiction of violence in the lives of blacks was a subject that was evaded by most black writers during the Harlem Renaissance period. For them, the portrayal of intra-racial violence would have endangered the racial concerns in black literature. Hurston ensured that the site of horror and terror revealed in her works is primarily that of the South and not of the north. Blacks writers who had forsaken the South for the north were severely criticized by Hurston. The working class population of the South provided appropriate characters for her narratives and supported her portrayal of the horrendous South. The past of the South weighs heavy on its present and hence it cannot be divorced from the ethos by which the region is characterized. Hurston narrated stories of black towns where everyday life of the blacks harrowed with shadows of the past could be told from a different perspective. Hurston showed how the blacks create history within themselves and how the seemingly distant whites and their values affected this creation of history. She studied her own people as a race and
presented fictional narratives as a medium of answering back to the dominant center through the use of the Gothic. Though this side of her works finds mention in some books and some articles, it has been largely overlooked and not explored. Hurston’s relationship with the Gothic has been investigated in Eric D. Curren’s article “Should Their Eyes Have Been Watching God? Hurston’s use of Religious Experience and Gothic Horror” and in “The Cruelty of Zora Hurston” written by Sean. In the light of such ideas, the present study attempts to raise and answer various questions such as – What is Zora Neale Hurston’s position in the realm of the American Gothic? How does Hurston seeks to portray the black experience through the African-American Gothic genre? What is Hurston’s position as a black female writer? How is the American Gothic profited by Hurston’s participation? What role does realism come to play in the fluid genre that the Gothic is? And lastly, how does Hurston subvert the dominant writings by various early Gothic writers while deploying some of their techniques?

**American Gothic : Theoretical Framework**

The American Gothic is a mode that is largely malleable and several crosscurrents have enriched its nature. Gothic in itself is a category which seems to break boundaries of all genres, where at the same time we have “sentimentality and grotesques, romance and terror, the heroic and the bathetic, philosophy and nonsense” (Kilgour 40). At first the darker issues that plague the Gothic would seem divorced from the land of equality and opportunity that America is publicized and popularized as. Hence, on the surface the idea of Gothic and the American nation appear incongruent. But this is just one central concern of the Gothic genre – appearance versus reality. In one of the foundational works on American Gothic Love and Death in the American Novel (1960), Leslie Fiedler established the link between Gothic and America forever, proclaiming that, “until the Gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin; and as long as that novel lasts, the Gothic cannot die” (143). The dominant discourse of America being the land of freedom is the one that is popularized and publicized, with the bloody history of the process of the formation of the American nation being constantly hidden and masked. The Gothic results from the dark recesses of national history that are detrimental to the construction of a uniform national narrative. The central issue that constitutes the American Gothic, however, is the underside of the American Dream. The writers of
the American Gothic were faced with a problem of no derelict castles, no oppressive religious institutions, no feudal lords with legacies, which could inspire narratives on the Gothic. This problem of what should constitute the subject matter of such works was to be solved by the American history of slavery and the horror and harrowing efforts of those who had newly arrived in America to ‘civilize’ those who already occupied the land – the Native Indians. Along with these two fundamental characteristics, as Allan-Lloyd Smith explicates, there were some other concerns. These were the solitariness of American existence, the new communities which were forever in danger of being in an unknown territory and the Puritan beliefs. All of these sought to point towards one kind of literature that would adequately mirror all challenges of the newly found empire. The idea of the American Dream, which glorified America as the land of equal opportunities for all and the land of light and affirmation, was deflated by its own history of murder and atrocities.

The writers of the American Gothic seek to interrogate and problematize this very aspect of the American Dream which the national discourse tries to veil and conceal from public view and popular discourse. A questioning of the process of civilization and reformation of a ‘barbaric’ people is the pivot around which the whole discourse of American Gothic revolves. In a new setting the notion of the Gothic gets revised and re-formed as new concerns, quite different from those that occupied the British Gothic fiction, are brought to the fore through this new category. This only seeks to confirm what Maggie Kilgour writes about the Gothic form being “a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of bits and pieces of the past” (qtd. in Goddu 5). The concept of the American Gothic exists simultaneously with the notion of the American Dream, though it can hardly be thought to acquire center stage owing to the fact that fewer people seek to represent this covert aspect of the American nation in their writings. Due to this reason, as Goddu explicates, the idea of the Gothic plaguing the discourse of the American nation was repressed for a long time. It is the horrors contained in the history of America that the American Gothic seeks to unravel.

Allan Lloyd-Smith correctly asserts that the issue of race was fundamental in defining a “powerful and long-lasting” (109) American version of the European Gothic. Racism was intimately related to the abuse of power. Also, the American Gothic asserted the similarity of corruption and depravity that was seen in the European Gothic. Corruption of figures of authority is an issue that was dominant in early
Gothic works. The fear of being affected by aristocrats and revolutionaries who could later affect the destiny of the nation led to the Gothicisation of such figures of authority, whom Michaud also chooses to call the first villains of Gothic fiction. Michaud also observes that the tradition of the Gothic novel is closely associated with the abuse of power. Hence, Gothic novels inevitably center on figures of authority that often misuse their power. These villains in the Gothic fiction are the key figures in turning the world in a Gothic narrative upside down. Fred Botting delineates a typical Gothic villain

By nefarious means Gothic villains usurp rightful heirs, rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honour of their wives and orphaned daughters. Illegitimate power and violence is not only put on display but threatens to consume the world of civilized and domestic values. In the skeletons that leap from family closets and the erotic and often incestuous tendencies of Gothic villains there emerges the awful specter of complete social disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire and law to tyranny (qtd. in Perkins 91).

Such characteristics of Gothic villains are clearly to be seen in those builders of the American nation who chose to serve only their interests while being inhumane to the non-whites. This abuse of power can extend from the domestic set-up to the entire nation. Whether its tyranny of gender, of religion or of money, the Gothic is always deeply concerned about the tyrannical use of power and the revolutionaries who struggle against it. If in England, the feudal lords used their authority to maintain their authority, in America this was done to establish authority in a newfound land. In the case of America, the terror was heightened because it was not, as Moses Coit Tyler observes, a battle against “tyranny inflicted, but only against tyranny anticipated” (qtd. in Michaud 10). The American nation was careful to nip the evil of supposed national degeneration in its bud, as those who built the empire, did not want to risk their newfound establishment. Samuel Kilger boldly asserts and establishes a pertinent relationship between the British and the American Gothic saying that “The ‘Gothic’ pattern of life which England succeeded in establishing only in part would thus be completely realized in America” (qtd. in Michaud 21).
While the writers categorized as American writers of the Gothic novel illustrate the ugliness and depravity of the South using their genius to the full extent, the fact that sets apart Hurston from all the writers is her ethnic origin. Hurston is an African-American writer whose ethnicity bears a heavy influence in her works about the South. Coming directly from the line of the slave communities, Hurston could present a first-hand account of all the major ill practices that was in the very fabric of the rural South, both antebellum as well as postbellum. Though Hurston was never a slave herself, she chose a form of writing – the African-American Gothic novel that directly descended from the slave narratives. Fiedler observes appropriately that the “proper subject” of American Gothic is “slavery” (Fiedler 378). The slave narratives though being a factual account of the lives of the slaves, were similar to the Gothic novels in the effect of terror and horror they produced. Thus, for a female black writer of the Gothic novel, it was inevitable that the novel should in someway or the other derive its form and content from the slave narratives. Kari J. Winter in her analysis of relationship between slave narratives and Gothic novels written by female writers draws some points of common concern,

First, they emphasized the terrifying aspects of the patriarchal family and depicted patriarchs as parasites who prey on the sexual, emotional, reproductive, and economic resources of women. Second, they insisted that all of society- from intimate family relationships to large state institutions- is corrupted by perverse power inequities. Third, they dramatized the means by which people in positions of power attempt to deprive subjugated peoples of the power to know. (Winter 55)

Goddu also supports the origin of the Gothic works of African-American writers in the slave narratives by drawing a parallel between early Gothic works and those of the later black authors. Here, the evil practice of slavery could be seen as harbouring the corruption of European feudalism. Entrapment in the plantations that had the capacity to entomb a black slave was identical to the entombment in old castles. Also, the slave masters could be regarded similar to the lustful feudal lords like Dracula, and the innocent slave women could be likened to those Gothic heroines who might try as hard as they can but could not escape the seducer-villain. Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) is an example of how real life events can be turned into Gothic narratives. Edwards opines that the numerous occurrences of happenings such
as “bludgeoning, flogging, burning, selling, and confinement of slaves” hinted at the Gothicism inherent in such narratives.

All these concerns are also central Hurston’s works through which she seeks to present the other side of the American Dream. Charles L. Crow neatly puts forward the concern of the American Gothic,

The Gothic is a literature of opposition. If the national story of the United States has been one of faith in progress and success and in opportunity for the individual, Gothic literature can tell the story of those who are rejected, oppressed, or who have failed (Crow 2).

In its new version, an American one, the Gothic sought to be engaged with a different concern – race and ethnicity. The trope of darkness, Leslie Fiedler asserts, that was always associated with the British Gothic now took a new meaning as this darkness came to be aligned with blackness in the American context. This alliance of American literature with race was also noted by Toni Morrison, who regarded that the foundational texts of American literature are indeed Gothic in their essence. This idea is also endorsed by Leslie Fiedler. In being associated with race “American Gothic literature criticizes America’s national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the nation’s claim to purity and equality” (Goddu 10). Thus, the voice of those who have been denied any voice in the dominant discourse of American glorification - the oppressed, the murdered, the enslaved - all solicit attention in the narratives of the Gothic. Botting asserts that Gothic literature bespeaks of cultural anxieties and in case of America those cultural anxieties pertain to the horrors of slavery and the annihilation of Native Americans. The fear of the guilt and trauma associated with the past, anxieties of race and maintenance of racial purity, also

fear of revolution, worries about the developing power of science; an increasing suspicion that empire and colonial experience might bring home an unwanted legacy (a suspicion related to xenophobia but also involving a fear of colonial otherness and practices such as Voodoo) (Smith 7).

These horrors of the past do not remain latent and seek revelation now and then through the aid of the Gothic. These anxieties come to the fore in the process of writing a text. Charles Brockden Brown, one of the writers who heralded the
American Gothic presented the horror of being haunted by the Native Americans in *Edgar Huntly* (1799). In his preface to the novel, he made clear that he has attempted to substitute “puerile superstitions and exploded manners; Gothic castle and chimeras” with “the incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of western wilderness” (qtd. in Smith 79). In most of Brown’s works, Fiedler observes, the struggle is in the mind of the protagonist who strives to fight against the evil in himself. Thus, the paradox of the American nation, that it is at once “rational and brutal, cruel and kind, perverse and natural, savage and civilized, red and white” (Anolik 98), also defines Brown’s works. Through the use of the ghosts and phantoms of Native Americans, such works “undermine the American Constitution and question national sanity” (Anolik 101). The derivation of the Gothic novel from slave narratives also unleashes the same concerns as those that are silent, are the women and the slaves and the region of the South. Edgar Allan Poe, a writer of the South, though not a Black, in his “The Black Cat” (1843), sheds light on the return of the repressed horrors of the enslaved blacks. The return of the black cat (metaphor for black slave) hints at the return of the Other, who was buried alive and hence repressed. Ginsberg points out how at a very pertinent moment in the story, as the narrator cuts his pet’s eyes with a penknife. This suggests the obliteration of black experience from the field of written and recorded history. Further, this hints at the fact that there are portions of the history that have been glossed over or not given adequate representation in the dominant discourse of American capitalism and monetary triumph. Through the portrayal of psychosis of the protagonist in the story we get a glimpse of the political stratagems in the American nation. A consolidation of relationship between the actions of the past and the consequences in the future is what the Gothic in its American version attempts to do. In words quite proclaiming the nature of the American Gothic, David Punter also recognizes the essence that American Gothic is formed of, “ghosts or phantoms, these are half-suppressed voices which we cannot be fully sure we are hearing – this is, in fact, the scenario of haunting” (Crow 35). With the onset of the post-modern age and the queer theory, a concern that is emerging in the American Gothic novel is the fear of other sexuality, the panic of homosexuals. In her study Diana Fuss throws light on homosexuals as the ghosts and the undead that threaten the national narrative of heterosexuality. William Veeder postulates how the Gothic can participate in the healing of the wounds that comes from repression. That which is silenced and denied finds a voice through the Gothic. This makes the genre a “counter
discursive formation” (Veedeer 28). It is this blending in of various emergent concerns that imparts the Gothic a metamorphic nature.

**Gothic: Subversive Literature**

The Gothic, from its infancy, was associated with defining and delineating the ‘other’. The voice of the suppressed, silenced, repressed, mutilated and murdered that the American Gothic seeks to bring to the fore, highlights the concern of the Gothic with the ‘other’. In its endeavours to glorify the dominant discourse, that voice which the nation is afraid of being heard is the voice of the ‘other’. This concern of the Gothic was prominent since its inception as that which is unaccepted by the dominant culture, that which is labeled as taboo, that which is not civilized, rational and moral constitutes the ‘other’. Kari J. Winter comments on one of the foundational texts of Gothic, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) that it attempted to “give voice to those people in society who are traditionally removed from the centers of linguistic power, people who are defined as alien, inferior, or monstrous solely because of physical features (such as sex or race) or material conditions (such as poverty)” (Winter 51).

Louis S. Gross rightly says in *Redefining the American Gothic* (1989) that the genre is intensely concerned with “the singularity and monstrosity of the Other: what the dominant culture cannot incorporate within itself, it must project outward onto this hated/desired figure” (Gross 90). This ‘other’ was distinguished from the self in its medievalism, barbarism and irrationality. While in early Gothic works ghosts were the center of attention and narratives, with changing times the metaphorical ghosts unleashed the horror in the text. This fear of the ghosts hence became displaced by what Ruth Bienstock Anolik calls “the figure of the racial or the social Other” with the writers of the Gothic being drawn towards

> the always anxious and transgressive Gothic as a ready medium for expression of racial and social anxieties, and are drawn to the horrifying and monstrous figure of the Gothic other as a ready code for the figuration of these anxieties (Anolik 2).

In the absence of real ghosts, the ‘other’ was made the repository of all that the self could not possess in a civilized society. Now, the commonplace, the mundane, the quotidian was invested with qualities of ghostliness and otherness. Often many Gothic works such as *Frankenstein* actually reflects the fear of the society of being...
dominated by beings of a darker race. *Dracula* (1897) is also analyzed as a text meant to provoke anxieties against the Irish, and in many other narratives, the figure of the vampire is said to represent Jews. In many Gothic works, often the villain-seducer who pursues the Gothic heroine is presented as a person of a darker race or represents an alliance between the forces of darkness and blackness and the forces of evil. This is true not only in case of men but women as well. Those women who had darker hair, darker eyes were associated with heightened sexuality and thinking as compared to the blondes in the narratives, who are passive recipients of actions. Morrison analyses how the figure of the racial Other consisting of Chinese, Mulatto, Indian and Native Americans are all represented by the figure of the African.

The process of discourse formation happened both ways. If on one hand the blacks demonized the white slave masters through slave narratives, the whites also wrote various texts that were pro-slavery on the account of the alleged primitivism and animalism seen in the blacks. Through the formation of this pro-slavery discourse a demeaning categorization to which the blacks were relegated to was that of animals. In fact this argument of the slaves being nothing better than animals was seen as a significant one for those who advocated slavery and found nothing wrong with slaves being treated as animals. This protest against dehumanization was seen in David Walker’s vehement cry that “all the inhabitants of the earth are called *men*, we and our children are *brutes* !” (qtd. in Ginsberg 100). Ginsberg suggests that this ‘othering’ of the blacks as animals was one of the greatest horrors of slavery. To quote some pro-slavery advocates would be evidence enough to prove how slavery flourished on the dehumanization of black people. J. K. Paulding claimed that the whites were undeniably right in classifying slaves as “the lowest in the scale of rational beings” (qtd. in Ginsberg 103). Joseph Holt Ingraham also approved that the blacks should be treated as “but little higher than [a] brute…the last and the lowest link in the chain of the human species” (qtd. in Ginsberg 104). Some writers of pro-slavery rhetoric presented a very romantic side of slavery, but the truth was that slavery was never minus atrocities. Thomas R. Dew makes it very clear in his words his perspective about slavery and the othering of the black human being

> There is nothing but slavery which can...eradicate the character...which mark[s] the independent savage. He may truly be compared to the wild beast of the forest – he must be broke and tamed before he becomes fit for labor
...There is nothing but slavery which can affect this – the means may appear exceedingly harsh and cruel – and, as among wild beasts many may die in the process of taming and subjugating...but in the end, it...consequently speeds on more rapidly the cause of civilization. (qtd. in Ginsberg 109)

In a revealing analysis by DeLamotte, who draws from Morrison’s concept of the Other African figure, a probable reason for the conception of the figure of the Other can be seen. This is the fear of the white race to assert its superiority and its very existence. In absence of a black Other, there would be no white ‘self’. For DeLamotte, it is this anxiety that informs the persona of the African Other. The preoccupation of the Gothic with establishing boundaries is also related to the threat that the Other poses for the subject. This ‘otherness’ is also inevitably associated with evil thoughts and actions. Morrison also explicates that the way in which the white Gothic writer presents the black persona as threatening is actually a reflection of the white about the threat in oneself.

The slave population ...offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness. This black population was available for meditations on terror – the terror of European outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, Nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin, greed (Morrison 37-38).

An idea, which runs constant throughout most of the early Gothic literature, is the notion of ‘otherness’ associated with the set trope of black being the embodiment of darkness and white being the angel of light. It is this antiquated association that the Gothic writers of myriad ethnicities choose to subvert through their works. African-American Gothic as a category is vital also because it destabilizes the notion of darkness associated with blacks. Instead it chooses to show that it is the ‘civilization’ mission that is barbaric in itself. DeLamotte mentions that this interrogation of ethnic representations in Gothic literature started with Heart of Darkness (1899) where evil was shown to be located not in the Dark Continent but in the heart of the imperialist. Though it is the black people who were stereotypically associated with evil, but here evil had its mainstay in the mind of the white. Such representations undercut the belief promoted in early Gothic works that situate the black, the not-white in the amoral and immoral zone, with infinite capacity for evil. African-American writers
specifically target those texts that proclaim white/s as the source of all that is good, moral, humane and civilized and in the process, “expose and demystify the white terrors created by white terror of black Others” (Anolik 28). Such authors, hints DeLamotte, to name a few can be Victor Sejour, Richard Wright, Paule Marshall and Pauline Hopkins. Such texts participate in what Goddu calls “haunting back” (Goddu 3), as the black authors, till now powerless to represent themselves have found a way to interrogate and complicate the works where only the black is the Other. Thus, when Goddu asserts that “through the African-American version, the Gothic’s relationship to history is fully revealed” (Goddu 12), the relationship between Black, the Gothic and American history becomes transparent. Consequently, what emerges as a clear depiction is that “African-American Gothicism evoke experiences of absence, fragmentation and loss, characteristic of “the black experience”” (Anolik 58). In more recent texts such as Amiri Baraka’s Dutchman (1964), the blacks are threatened by the presence of a white phantom. The text highlights the effects of white culture, which renders the protagonist almost neurotic in his attempts to live as a black man amidst American culture. The narrative aims at revolutionary means and violence to get rid of the whiteness seeped into the minds of the blacks, crippling their identity. The American Gothic was also affected by the anxiety that plagued the nation after the Haitian revolution. A revolution is itself a source of anxiety and a revolution led by slaves seemed a terrifying event by the American slave masters who depended on their wealth and lives on the black slaves. Eric Sundquist opines “Haiti came to seem the fearful precursor of black rebellion throughout the New World, becoming an entrenched part of master-class ideology in both Latin-America and the United States” (Sundquist 32). Both the categories of people – anti-slavery as well as pro-slavery – used the revolution to forward their ideologies. For those who wished to abolish slavery, Haitian revolution was an inspiration and as Smith opines, it raised the issue of the level of violence that can be used to assert the rights of the slaves. On the other hand, for those who advocated slavery, it revealed a revolution led by slaves could only lead to bloodshed and extreme violence. Quite pertinently

Like a prism, the trope of San Domingo reflected all conflicting sides of the tangled question of bondage and became a prophetic simulacrum of events feared to lie on the horizon of American slavery (Sundquist 32).
This was the fear of a war lead by the Other and one of the first leaders of this war, Smith indicates, became a mythical figure in the struggle of the slaves. In another work, Bryan Edward’s *History of the West Indies* (1793), the horrors of slave rebellions of the ‘Caribees’ of West Indies are presented in great detail.

they surrounded the overseer’s house about four in the morning, in which eight or ten White people were in bed, every one of whom they butchered in the most savage manner, and literally drank their blood mixed with rum . . . then set fire to the buildings. In one morning they murdered between thirty and forty Whites, not sparing even infants at the breast (qtd. in Smith 219).

Thus, existence of the blacks and revolutions were portrayed as sites and events of potential trauma for the whites which fuelled the already circulating discourse of black barbarism.

As the Black writers seek to subvert the dominant discourse of the American Dream, the setting in such fiction of terror and horror plays a significant role. This setting was the actual location of the American South. Trudier Harris recognizes a thread that runs common in many black writers of the South, i.e., they tend to depict the land of the South in its full horror through the collective memory bequeathed to them via their Black heritage. Trudier Harris in *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line* (2009) narrates a folklore where the fetus of a black woman refuses to come out of its mother’s womb because the mother came to the South to give birth to the child, the doctor hears the child saying,

As long as South is South, I won’t come out!

No, I won’t be born down here. (Harris, 4)

While in another one, God himself refuses to accompany a man, once he enters the South. The reason of such fear lies in the reputation that the South carries for absence of justice in the courtrooms and the oppressive conditions of the white houses and plantations. As Historian David Brion Davis writes about the life in the Southern plantations, “we must never forget that these same ‘welfare capitalist' plantations in the Deep South were essentially ruled by terror. Even the most kindly and humane masters knew that only the threat of violence could force gangs of field hands to work from dawn to dusk ‘with the discipline,’” as one
contemporary observer puts it, 'of a regular trained army.' Frequent public floggings reminded every slave of the penalty for inefficient labor, disorderly conduct, or refusal to accept the authority of a superior" (Davis 196). Hence, all this imparts an image of tragic gloominess, pessimism and disharmony to the South. Goddu makes it clear saying that “[s]igns of the South’s excesses serve as a warning that America might not be immune from Europe’s diseases after all” (Goddu 18). It is the degeneracy inherent in slavery that blights the American nation. Using this memory they represent that horrifying side of the South and such literature also gets classified in the sub-category of the African-American Gothic. The representation of this side of the Gothic is clarified by Eric Savoy’s observation that “the Gothic registers a trauma in the strategies of representation as it brings forward a traumatic history toward which it gestures but can never finally refer” (Martin and Savoy 11). Toni Morrison declares in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), that the African-American Gothic is the American Gothic and her claim cannot be dismissed outrightly. If not the source of the whole category, it at least occupies a considerable space in the oeuvre of the American Gothic. This makes the role of those authors who represent the horror of the South also vital in the theorization and shaping up of the whole category. Gothic literature written by the blacks is subversive and it designates the white as the Other – the source of terror, corruption, degeneracy and disingenuousness. In such literature the blacks align whiteness with “the terrible, the terrifying and the terrorizing” (hooks 96). Richard Wright, Jean Toomer, James Baldwin are some prominent black writers of the modern age who brought to the fore the dread associated with the South. Among the greatest of atrocities against the blacks in the South was lynching. Abel Meeropol wrote the poem which opens this study, on the subject of lynching. Lynching involved killing of black people by the whites to perpetuate their supremacy in the South. The practice was horrific in its execution as most of the times blacks were hanged on the trees, followed by mutilation or burning. Largely a practice where only men were executed, lynching suspended the black men in the South in a perpetually threatening zone, where they could be lynched anytime. Harris quotes Baldwin who writes about the haunted nature of the Southern land, at once indicating towards its beauty and its horror.

The South assumes greater importance in the works of Black writers because the claims of their ethnicity do reflect in their works. Hurston, says Harris, came across
the fearful situations of the South while she was doing fieldwork under Franz Boas. But in spite of the challenging situations facing her as a female writer, the South occupied a preeminent place in all her works. The source of horror in the South is primarily racism and the injustice associated with it. Demonic practices like lynching and hanging black people on trees were commonplace even at the time when Hurston was writing. The land of abundance and bounty used against the blacks becomes the source and subject matter of horror for the black writers. The plantations of white slave owners are the sites of all kinds and degrees of violence unleashed against the blacks – physical, psychological and sexual. The treatment of blacks as commodities, to further their own interests by the callous and cruel slave owners lies at the root of this terror of the South. As a consequence of this fear of the Southern territory, “African-American writers have thus played a role in creating a negative mythology of the South, in contributing to its image as an unhealthy place for people of African descent” (Harris 16). Baby Suggs in Beloved (1987) voices such association when she says that “[t]hose white things have taken all that I had or dreamed and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in this world only black folk”. In fact the terror of whiteness is so entrenched in Sethe’s mind that she rather kills her child than let them also partake of that same terror and horror. Simultaneously reflecting upon myriad political and economic concerns, the Gothic literature about the South most significantly chooses to focus upon the culture of violence that slavery popularized and demonstrated. The repercussions of slavery - both immediate as well as long lasting - constitute the subject matter of such narratives.

Associated with the genre of the Gothic is a trope that started with the European Gothic and gained immense prominence with the American Gothic – that of miscegenation. Since the analysis here focuses on American Gothic and African-American Gothic, it is imperative to discuss this trope at some length. This is a cultural anxiety most fundamental to this genre known by the name of miscegenation i.e., of sexual relations between whites and blacks leading to mixed offspring. The term first appeared in David Goodman Croly’s pamphlet in 1864 to scare white male voters about the mingling of the two races if slavery would be abolished. Justine Edwards suggests that “[t]he rhetoric of terror, deformity, degeneration, and monstrosity was used by racial “scientists” to mark the essential differences between blackness and whiteness to justify white supremacy and to discourage any potential
merger of the two races” (Edwards xii). Such Gothic discourses were composed and formulated by synchronization between the views presented by various scientists and writers of fiction. In a passage that can be noted for its pungent views, Edward Long in *Candid Reflections . . . Upon the Black Cause* (1772) expressed his views regarding the mixing of black and white race. For the whites it was alarming scenario that many women of lower classes were marrying blacks.

By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus, in the course of a few generations more the English blood will become . . . contaminated with this mixture . . . this alloy may spread so extensively as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of the people, till the whole nation resembles the Portuguese and the Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. This is a venomous and dangerous ulcer, that threatens to spread its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it. (qtd. in Hoggle 230)

The sense of urgency, panic and dread associated with such mixing of the races in quite notable in Long’s words. It were such views as lay at the base of Gothic literature that presented miscegenation as a threat to white superiority. Miscegenation in the American context was all the more a danger and a source of anxiety as a large population in America consisted of the slaves.

The fear of miscegenation was linked with the moral decay of the nation and a violation of the purity of white women. Ianovici throws light on the notion that the ideas of the purity of white women was associated with the idea of the black man as the beast and the rapist. The white men of the South, Ianovici opines, were relegated to the status of only financial providers for their women. It were the slaves who labored hard for them. To give themselves a new designation, that of the protectors of the white women, the black men were stereotyped as beasts and rapists. The formulation of this stereotype branded the black men as potential threat to the purity of white women. This carefully manufactured anxiety of the Southern white community was exaggerated with the abolition of slavery, as now, the whites presumed that the free black bestial man would again revert to his savage nature. The Southern society of the whites also functioned and maintained its existence by floating stereotypes where the white women were denied their sexuality and were
expected to be delicate and virtuous. As Kari J. Winter opines, slavery “made it profitable for white men to divide their conflicting notions of Woman into stereotypes of good white angels and evil black beasts” (Winter 57). The fear of the white virgin being defiled is one of the topmost fear in Gothic literature written by white writers. This was the concern behind Gothic works that vilified figures of racial Other. Edwards opines “The Gothic trope of the evil man forcefully corrupting innocent women thus acquired a racial dimension, generating a fear of interracial rape and violent miscegenation” (Edwards 57). The famous *Frankenstein* according to Allan Lloyd-Smith, voiced the anxieties generated by a miscegenated figure, one who was made of parts of dead human and animal. The horror of its birth lay in its transgressive body that did not adhere to any boundaries. Smith notes that Shelley did not use the dead body of one human being for conversion into a monster as she wished to portray various anxieties related to race and species. Mark Twain’s *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), a Gothic work, is also a text that dwells on the theme of miscegenation and transgression of the colour line.

Kimberley A. Frohreich in her article attaches miscegenation with the figure of the vampire - an attempt that inevitably links the Gothic with miscegenation. This approach of hers is based on the notion that the vampire figure has always existed on the boundaries of animalism and humanity, life and death, masculinity and femininity and heterosexuality and homosexuality. As Donna Haraway notes “vampires are vectors of category transformation in a racialised, historical, national unconscious…a figure that both promises and threatens racial and sexual mixing” (Haraway 330). Along with threatening the racial boundaries, the figure of the vampire also creates a negative mythology about the racial Other. Frohreich observes that in America, the origin of the term miscegenation can be seen during the same time period as the origin of the vampire figure. Infact the term miscegenation was originally “a specter” (Frohreich 34). Also a very strong rationale was created with the vampirish threat being associated only with the black man and not woman. Martha Hodes suggests how Southern slave masters formulated the notion that having sexual intercourse with the black woman did not corrupt the white race, but it was endangered due to the black man’s union with the white woman. Hence, the white woman was to be protected from the black man and from her own sexual attraction for the black man. Due to this reason, as Frohreich asserts,
In much the same way the spectre of miscegenation permeated the white American conscious, the vampire is now a major cultural presence through which America’s changing perceptions of the category of race and race relations are articulated (Frohreich 34).

In America a person with even one drop of Black blood would be branded as a black. Due to miscegenation, the whites could be easily deluded by one’s skin colour and one could easily pass as a white. This situation was deemed as a horrific one by white supremacists and many Gothic discourses were penned keeping this viewpoint in the mind. Passing could make the whole social arrangement run awry as blacks who were supposed to be slaves could pass as white masters. Many scholars against this mixing of the races located the reasons of such terror in hybridity. For researchers like Samuel George Morton, hybridity entailed dangers such as infertility and susceptibility to diseases. This in turn could entail the risk of a whole nation getting degenerate. Such intellectuals also presented scientific facts to substantiate their claims. A fact that is notable is that there was an upsurge in such texts after the abolition of slavery. Therefore, such texts can be seen, as Edwards suggests, to be new form of continuing white supremacy. Some scholars presented actions of white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan in a favourable light such that to save white women from being corrupted by black rapists, their actions were justified. The fear of rape also arose partly from the fear of miscegenation and threat of corrupted bloodlines. Edwards observes that “intermixture inspired fear because it not only threatened to corrupt Southern racial purity, but it had the potential to destabilize the Southern caste system and shed doubt on the legacy of a great Southern “civilization”’(Edwards 92). Charles Chestnutt, another Gothic writer of the South with mixed heritage suggested that it is the ideology of black and white segregation that lead to horrific practices such as lynching.

The subject of miscegenation also brings in its wake the topic of mulattoes – persons of both the black and the white lineage. The existence of these people of mixed racial descent served as a warning signal for those who endorsed white supremacy. In many texts, mulattoes were presented as characters who were a threat to the white supremacy and were primitive and barbaric just like the blacks. They were most often than not presented with moral and physical depravity. It was fabricated by the supporters of slavery that their presence challenged the stability of the society and
white supremacist organization had to intervene to save the society from their ill-effects. Edwards cites social scientist Joseph LeConte who made strong claims about blacks and mulattoes belonging to the lower levels of social hierarchy. For him, it was imperative that blacks/mulattoes should not be treated same as whites and laws similar to slavery were essential for the American nation to progress and not degenerate. Writers who sought to question such ideas expressed their views through the mode of the Gothic. David Punter asserts that “the ‘site’ of the Gothic is obsessed with the law, with its operations, justifications, limits” (Gothic Pathologies 19). Thus, writers like Charles Chestnutt along with various modern writers protested against such laws, which promoted injustice rather than justice. Such Gothic narratives questioned the right to property that was only available to the offspring of white mothers and white fathers. Those who were of mixed racial heritage were labeled as the monsters - a result of transgression. Even if not regarded as monsters, in terms of the Gothic, hybrid offspring can certainly be said to be the specters that pervaded the space between the boundary of blackness and whiteness. Mulattoes subvert the binary classification of blacks and whites. In many texts with mulatto protagonists, their hidden identity is the Gothic secret. A mixed racial identity is often a haunting presence for the characters, which lurks in the background and can come to the fore any time. Also there is a chance that if the black heritage is hidden or repressed by the protagonist, it might come to the fore in the offspring. This chance in itself is the origin of horror in the characters as it can be seen as the revenant coming to life. Mixed blood persons who pass as whites are also compared to vampires in such narratives. Edwards notes,

they both signify erotic deviations and sexual sadism; their lives are products of “corrupt” blood; and they both highlight the problem of confused, vulnerable, or secret identities, fear of exposure, evil masquerading as respectability, or respectability built upon hidden corruption (Edwards 104).

Being a person of mixed racial lineage is also a complication in terms of identity issues and the Gothic effect arises from there being no category to describe the ‘type’ of person a hybrid is or is supposed to be. While there is neat classification (of course formulated by white supremacists) of black and white qualities- nothing is said about the hybrid. Thus, language fails and social identities fall short for a person of mixed racial heritage. Such lack of identity increases the probability of ‘passing’ – an
experience that is indeed Gothic in terms of myriad anxieties related to it. Also, as Edwards suggest, discourses of passing and the identity reflect the concern of the Gothic with the idea that the sins of the father is visited upon the children. Lineage, whatever it is conceived to be, carries with it the ghosts of the past. Hawthorne’s “The Custom House” describes how the author is burdened by the acts of his ancestors such as Native American massacres, witch trial etc. These acts weighed upon his identity as he wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and this evinces the role of identity, miscegenation, mulattoes and passing in the Gothic narratives of the American nation. The notion of mulattoes and miscegenation is also intertwined with the notion of violation of black females. The presence of a mulatto indicates sexual assault and rape. Thus, the mulattoes are evidence of the sins of the white slave masters who haunt the American nation. Maisha L. Wester asserts that “all mulattoes must prove racial specters referring either to a repressed history of violation or...the law’s repression of romantic interracial liaisons”(Wester 80).

Along with the racial Other, the Gothic is also intimately concerned with the Other in terms of gender, i.e., the woman. The interrogation of this notion is all the more important in this analysis as Hurston was a female black writer. David Punter holds that feminism was instrumental in raising the stature of Gothic studies. The definition of being a man depended on the definition of not being a woman. Thus, for definition of its manhood, patriarchal culture depends on the other gender. Simone de Beauvoir famously proclaimed in *The Second Sex* (1949) “Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female — whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male.” Sandra Gilman also regards that the white man who was burdened with his own excessive sexuality displaced this need to control on female sexuality – the sexuality of the Other. To counter the discourse of Gothic works by males, a new category- the female Gothic - emerged. More than being invented, this classification was discovered, as some eighteenth and nineteenth century works also fell into this bracket. Kari J. Winter opines that while male Gothic is about the son’s oedipal complex against the power and authority of the father, the female Gothic is about the rebellion of the estranged daughters. For such daughters the only hope is overthrowing the whole patriarchal system. The horrors of slavery though enormous for men, were increased several folds for a slave woman due to her gender and sexuality. Jarette Macaule sheds light on the animalistic sexuality that a black woman
was supposed to possess due to which she was considered as an appropriate pleasure-giving object for the white men. As Alice Walker holds, “for centuries the black woman served as the pornographic outlet for white men in Europe and America” (qtd. in Macaule 8-9). Slave women were considered as breeders who gave birth to future slaves. Though in terms of property or right to vote or domestic duties, the lot of an enslaved black woman and a white woman were same but with regard to the cruelties inflicted upon a slave black woman, her existence was much afflicted. It is because the marginalized gender among the whites (the white women) also exercised power over the marginalized black women.

The issue of bondage is also inevitably related with the idea of freedom and for many enslaved black women or otherwise, freedom came from being able to express themselves. Silencing of female expression and/or their retribution towards this silencing is a central theme of female Gothic literature. Michelle Masse suggests that the foundation of all Gothic literature is a denial of the dominant culture to give woman the status of a subject. Ellen Moers coined the term ‘female Gothic’ in 1976 in her book Literary Women defining the work of female writers in the nineteenth century. However, the connotations of this term have been changing and women in female Gothic literature are playing a more and more active part in asserting their voice, of course, in the Gothic manner. Among contemporary writers, Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter have contributed immensely towards this genre. With its changing functions, the female Gothic now gives expression to female sexuality. Elaine Showalter asserts

One of the earliest critical manifestations of the change in consciousness that came out of the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s was the theorization of the Female Gothic as a genre that expressed women’s dark protests, fantasies, and fear (qtd. in Munford 182).

Just like the African-American Gothic, the female Gothic is also intimately related with the quotidian. Each setting of the modern and post-modern world harbours danger for women and this constitutes the focal anxiety of female Gothic literature. Many black women and their voices, even if expressed were not heard by the dominant culture as it depended on white appreciation. Winter points out that the narratives of writers like Phillis Wheatley could garner attention only because she
received the attention of the whites. Thus the voice of the victims gained recognition only when the victimizers approved of it. Not only this, it was after being recognized as authentic by whites that any slave narratives were regarded as trustworthy and real accounts. Winter explicates that the writers of slave narratives and female Gothic works sought to overturn this patriarchal framework. Most significantly they struck at the institution of marriage and motherhood, which for them operated on the basis of sado-masochism. Feminist works as early as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) started this process. Diane Long Hoeveler draws attention towards Wollstonecraft’s work as “proto-Gothicist” due to its subversive nature. She also draws attention to the notion that the manner in which female victims in early female Gothic literature assert themselves is through “professional femininity”(qtd. in Rodriguez 3). Thus, it is through a pretension of weakness that women assert themselves against patriarchal ideology. In Gothic fiction, love was perilous and marriage was claustrophobic and cruel. Ann Radcliffe’s heroines in particular were perpetually afraid and ran into trouble wherever they went – towards the man or away from the man. Though Radcliffe’s stories were situated in far-off lands, the dangers inherent in female existence were very real. Specifically talking about the American Gothic, female protagonists have played a pivotal role in defining horrors pertaining to the history and geography of the nation.

Female Gothic literature participates in interrogating the boundaries that limit women and their role within confines. The protagonists in such fiction challenge the fence lines that demarcate a woman as a virgin, a mother and a prostitute. Michelle Masse is not wrong when she compares and establishes a relationship between the Gothic and pornography.

*[The Gothic uses woman’s whole body as a pawn: she is moved, threatened, discarded, and lost. And as the whole person is abducted, attacked, and so forth, the subtext metaphorically conveys anxiety about her genital risk. Pornography reverses the synecdochal relationship by instead using the part to refer to the whole: a woman is a twat, a cunt, a hole. The depiction of explicitly genital sexual practice which is pornography’s métier can be simply a difference in degree, not in kind, from the Gothic’s more genteel abuse (In the Name of Love 108).]*
Thus, the horrors of the Gothic are not far away from pornography. Diane Wallace also aligns the writing of the female Gothic with ghost stories, as the female existence for most writers is ghostly and not real (in terms of their powerless situation). Luce Irigaray opines how women are “nowhere . . . never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts” (qtd. in Wallace 62). Wallace regards Elizabeth Gaskell, May Sinclair and Elizabeth Bowen as ghost story writers. Ghost stories were employed by these authors to disregard the norms associated with female Gothic novels, such as explained supernatural occurrences and a conventional happy ending. In a shorter frame of a short story, these writers did the opposite by using unexplained supernatural events and also challenged the issue of a happy ending. One of the famous stories which has been rendered into myriad versions is the Bluebeard story. Fundamentally a French folktale, Bluebeard is the story of a nobleman who keeps murdering his wives. In a hidden room of his castle all his murdered wives are hung with the floor washed with the blood of all the dead wives. His new wife discovers this chamber and strives to save herself and is also successful at the end. The wife’s brothers kill bluebeard with his property inherited by the wife. Many Gothic writers have revisited this tale among which Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Margaret Atwood’s *Bluebeard’s Egg* (1983) are its contemporary versions. In the Bluebeard stories it is the male who is cast in the figure of the other. The story is told from the perspective of the female. Wallace cites Gaskell’s “The Grey Woman” as a similar story that voices the anxieties about a woman’s identity in the Victorian age. Similarly in May Sinclair’s “The Villa Desiree”, Wallace observes how male sexuality leads to terror for a female, a terror that is most primitive in nature. Female existence in the house again suggests imprisonment and entombment. The picture of an ideal family is presented as nothing but a veneer and the house is the Gothic castle.

A woman’s sexuality was the source of terror and this fear of female sexuality assumed immense dimensions when a woman was black. The white woman was the virgin, the innocent, the undefiled one, while the black woman was promiscuous and lewd. The relationship of race and gender became most manifested in case of a black woman. A black woman was portrayed in most narratives as one who has perverse sexuality. Sander Gilman points out,

The association of the black, especially the black female, with the syphilophobia of the late nineteenth century was ... manifest. Black females do
not merely represent the sexualised female, they also represent the female as the source of corruption and disease. (Gilman 189)

bell hooks claimed that black women are seen as sexual objects to be enjoyed outside marriage. They are portrayed as “sexually free”, “sexually ready”, akin to “prostitution”, and are available and accessible. Leslie Fiedler notes how the fallen woman in American Gothic fiction is a usually a racially mixed or black woman. Also, in the nineteenth century, women who were sexually fast were thought to be of racially mixed lineage. Maisha L. Wester suggests that many laws were formulated to render inter-racial marriage as illegal. However, if any marriage took place between a white man and a black woman, the black woman was doubly dishonoured – first on account of being black and then on the account of being women who engaged in illegal sexual relationship. The African-American Gothic draws attention towards this stereotypical notion and gives the black woman a chance to speak for herself. For a black mother, the house or the domestic space, Wester suggests, becomes Gothic for she has no control over her life, her body and her children. Danger of sexual violation lurks at every step. At times the white slave masters also raped their own biological but illegitimate daughters forming incestuous sexual liaisons. With no regard for generations or blood relationships, sexual violence towards the black women was omnipresent. Black female body, if anything at all, meant a profitable commodity for the plantations. To counter such notions, Wester notes,

the black Gothic illustrates black women’s utter entrapment within racist and patriarchal traditions that position them as threatening seductresses, objects of male interracial competition and idyllic signifiers of ancestry (Wester 120).

**Gothic: Changing definitions**

The definitions of Gothic literature are ever changing and this can be substantiated by the fact that the genre has evolved so much since its inception. No more dwelling on fantastical happenings, the desire of the Gothic writers to trace the depravity and dissensions within the human self. This is an evidence of the fact that the Gothic as a genre has gone places. This brings us to question of how this assimilation of realism and Gothic imagination can retain the characteristics of a text fundamentally regarded as Gothic one. To this question, Tunku Halim’s answer consists of categorizing any novel as Gothic not based on the effect it has on the reader. To support his claim,
Halim argues that the experience of terror or horror that leads to any text being classified as Gothic is fundamentally a subjective criteria. It varies from person to person and according to the temporality of the text and the reader. A reader or critic living in the twenty-first century might or might not feel terrified reading a classic Gothic text such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). For Halim, a Gothic work is a result of fusion between tradition of Gothicism and the talent of a particular writer. Hence, Halim first suggests that the task of locating a text in the Gothic realm should be left to the critic, not an ordinary reader. Secondly, a text should be classified or not classified as Gothic depending on the presence of Gothic tropes in it. This makes the task more empirical and less subjective. This assertion leads us to another strand of this thought that Gothic tropes can also be present in a novel that has elements of realism in it. The presence of Gothic tropes in slave narratives is an evidence of this claim. This notion also runs against the idea that Gothic is an escapist form. Rather, as many scholars of the American Gothic, like Mark Edmundson, Toni Morrison and Teresa Goddu assert, the Gothic in America is closely aligned to reality and is not an escape from it. To quote Morrison, Gothic is “‘head-on encounter with the very real, pressing historical forces and the contradictions inherent in them’” (qtd. in Jones 64). The development of sub-categories, like the female Gothic and the African-American Gothic, hint at an intimate connection between Gothic and realism. Jones indicates how the Gothic has permeated into discussion about everything from the Vietnam War to the Oprah Winfrey show. David Punter writes about this descending of apparitions into everyday life

we live in a world peopled by ghosts, phantoms, specters. There are, Derrida assures us from within a long tradition, specters haunting Europe, or haunting the West; there are, Abraham and Torok affirm, phantoms haunting and distorting the process of psychological transmission down the generations. There are, theorists of postmodernism assert, perhaps only simulacra; entranced by the flickering glow of the new technologies, our bodies vanish from our apprehension, leaving only media constructs, apparitions of desire, hungry revenants whose appetite is matched only by their impotence (qtd. in Jones 21).

Thus ghosts in the modern and postmodern age are to be understood in the metaphorical sense, not just literal. In a very suggestive example using the concept of
‘habitus’ by Bordieu, Jones analyses the ever-evolving and mutable nature of Gothic. Bordieu explicates habitus as

principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be... adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (qtd. in Jones 37).

Thus habitus allows for adaptation along with some essential features for retention of the category. Jones conceptualizes the notion of Gothic habitus and explicates that “Understood as habitus, the Gothic describes a way of writing, a way of reading, a way of thinking about stories, a way of imagining; and this description stretches to include our ability to make blackly humorous jokes, or to dress up grotesquely on Halloween” (Jones 38). This conception allows for both the retention of the genre as well as its metamorphosis. It deals with the various ways in which a text belongs to a particular category, and also participates in the changing of the definition of that category. There exists a symbiotic relationship between the two – the genre and the text. To make his argument clearer he gives the example of the game of football being played professionally by a team with all the paraphernalia associated with it and the game of football being played by children on the streets. Jones points out that though the children on the street do not play the game in a strict manner, yet it is still the game of football, not tennis. Hence, the concept of a Gothic habitus allows for the understanding of the genre changing as well as staying the same in its essential nature.

Coming to the first part of the title of this study i.e., “Spectres of the South”, I wish to explicate the association of this term American Gothic. Haunting is inevitably associated with specters or ghosts or phantoms and these characters have populated the Gothic fiction since its inception. Without the haunting of the ghosts, Gothic fiction is rather ineffectual. Ghosts have been and are still being sensationalized in many novels of the pulp fiction and horror movies such as, *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and the famous *Scream* series (1996, 1997, 2000). However, the analysis of specters in the current study calls for a more refined approach that is less sensational. Without the presence of ghosts, regards Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock in *Spectral America* (2004), history would be linear. The rupture brought in the history due to various conflicting and co-existing narratives is
the aim of presenting a Gothic text with a ghost in it. The metaphor of the ghost is also quite pertinent to the current political scenario in America. Many intellectuals such as filmmaker Michael Moore compares Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to the monster in *Frankenstein*. This problem of creating monsters was not limited to Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden. Moore explicates “We liked playing Dr. Frankenstein. We created lot of monsters – the Shah of Iran, Somoza of Nicaragua, Pinochet of Chile – and then we expressed ignorance or shock when they ran amok and massacred people” (qtd. in Young 1). Frederick Douglass also compared slavery to the “pet monster of American people” (qtd. in Young 4). In his vehement *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829) David Walker compares slave existence to being dead (hence ghost-like). For him slaves are “living corpses” who can be brought to life through a rebellion. Young cites Eleanor Tayleur who writes in her 1904 essay how the African-American women are leading their lives as

> dark, helpless, hopeless mass...leading purposeless lives...as she exists in the South today the black woman is the Frankenstein product of civilization, a being created out of sectional hate and revenge, and set in motion by wild experimentalists who knew not what they did” (qtd. in Young 58).

Thus, spectrality and the Gothic are closely intertwined with each other. As Derrida asserts, ghosts are a result of dispossession. It is this act of being dispossessed in a culture or in a country that produces ghosts. The terror of these hosts who hover on the margins is that of contamination of the center. Ghost stories, as Avery Gordon suggests, is to write about narratives that have been excluded or rendered invisible. Ghosts are “one form by which something lost or barely visible, or seemingly not there to supposedly our well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us” (qtd. in Kroger xii). As we talk of ghosts or specters in the American context, what emerges is that

> the idea of ghost...has remained consistently vital to American culture, but...particular ghostly manifestations are always constructions embedded within specific historical contexts and invoked for more or less political purposes...America has always been the land of ghosts, a nation obsessed with the spectral (Weinstock 8).
The roots of specters in America can be traced back to the Puritans and the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. John Kucich also sees the Ghost Dance movement of the Native American Tribes in 1890 as a means of preserving their traditions. Another instance of specters in American culture can be of the disease of fugue spread in the nineteenth century in which the people affected suddenly took a flight from the scene of haunting. Jessica Lieberman looks at this disease from the racial angle, as the black patients of this disease were not thought to be worthy of such attention while the whites engaged the interest of everyone. In postmodern times, texts such as Morrison’s Beloved (1987) erase the difference between reality and supernaturalism, subverting the use of both supernaturalism and reality to assert a different facet of history. Also, the specter of burgeoning consumerism in the twenty-first century is one that threatens the Salem specters, as shown by Marshall who focuses on how the development of Salem as a tourist spot hints at a lack of haunting, and this absence, in turn, is haunting itself. Consequently, from the ghost being relegated to an altogether different realm, it moves to merging with the ordinary and the popular. Henry James’ canonical text The Turn of the Screw (1898) is a novel replete with ghosts. As Andrew Smith posits, the story begins as a ghost story competition and problematizes the concept of ghostliness. Among other anxieties that ghost stories present, class concerns are prominent, as middle class houses, Smith opines, become increasingly haunted. Ghosts in the morally ambivalent times of the twentieth century signified, Smith points out, problems about existence and moral vacuity. In modern times ghosts invaded everyday life. Thus, the figure of ghosts who were considered as solely pervading the genre of the fantastic or the romantic, came to occupy the real. Terror as result became more fearful. Ghosts performed the function of clarifying the boundaries between normal and abnormal, good and evil. However, with the modern and postmodern age this boundary got increasingly blurred. Botting asserts that in the contemporary ghost stories, ghosts act as “sites of identification, sympathy, and self-recognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant monsters are rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying, persecutory, and inhuman shapes” (qtd. in Punter and Byron 265). A good example can be Francis Ford Coppola’s film version of Dracula (1992), where Dracula is presented with a humane identification with the Other. David Punter explicates how Gothic narratives focus on the production of monsters due to cultural
forces. Also, the focus is on how the notion of monstrosity is generated and what makes a monster the other and the alien. And this also
denaturalizes the human, showing the supposedly superior human to be,
like the monster’s otherness, simply the product of an ongoing struggle
in the discursive construction and reconstruction of power (Punter and
Byron 264).

Horror comes with the recognition that within all of us there are dormant monsters.
In Beloved (1987) also we get to hear that there is no house in the town that is not
haunted by the ghost of a Black, aligning the supernatural with the mundane. Thus
reality is not contradicted but reframed. Rather than unreality being the center of
narrative, reality becomes reconceptualized. In a concept immensely useful for the
analysis here is of ‘cultural haunting’ posited by Kathleen Brogan. Brogan seeks to
move beyond the ghost stories to explore and analyze the role of ghosts in texts
written by certain writers who add and complicate the presence of the specter.

The story of cultural haunting...brings to the foreground the communal nature
of its ghosts...Stories of cultural haunting differ from other twentieth century
ghost stories in exploring the hidden passageways not only of the individual
psyche but also of a people’s historical consciousness. Through the agency of
ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or
fragmented are recuperated or revised...Centrally concerned with the issues of
communal memory, cultural transmission, and group inheritance, stories of
cultural haunting share the plot device and master metaphor of the ghost as go-
between, an enigmatic transitional figure moving between past and present,
death and life, one culture and another (qtd. in Gussow 187).

Narratives categorized under African-American Gothic largely perform this function
and Hurston’s texts are no exception. The ghosts who figure in Hurston’s work are
not literal ghosts but metaphorical ones. These haints symbolize faulty values of
whites, Jim Crow laws, American consumerism, patriarchy and lack of ability to love
among others things. Ghosts perform the task of bringing the past to the present,
resonating what William Faulkner said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”(qtd. in Kroger and Anderson x). Ghosts, especially in Hurston’s fiction also
manifest the corruption of blacks by the values of whites. This corruption ensures that
even after slavery the reign of the whites on the blacks continue and flourish in the South. This perpetuation also does not let the feeling of brotherhood and solidarity blossom among the blacks. Traumatized by the cruelties of the whites, the blacks, as seen in Hurston’s fiction cannot divorce themselves from an enslaved state of mind. The animosity among the blacks, the self-hatred and malpractices such as colourism are a result of the ghost of white supremacy projected through various means. Even after the abolition of slavery, the mental set-up of the black could not be free from degenerate legacy which slavery has cast upon them. As Kroger and Anderson postulate, “[u]sing the metaphor of the ghost, living character in these texts finds themselves silenced, marginalized suppressed by the society in which they take part” (Kroger and Anderson xii). Thus, this manifestation also is a reminder that the American nation can never be free of the sins such as annihilation of the Native Americans and slavery. Through the metaphorical presence of these specters, the South never ceases to be a site of horror for the blacks.

The presence of metaphorical ghosts points out towards another aspect of Hurston’s works – the simultaneous presence of the Gothic and the real. Believed to be opposite genres, the Gothic and the real intermingle in the works of most writers of African-American Gothic. Toni Morrison talks about this merging of the two in her essay “Rootedness: The Ancestor as a Foundation”

I could blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which black people looked at the world. We are very practical people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing thing. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were “discredited knowledge” that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was “discredited”. And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge possible. (qtd. in Patterson 5 )
Eric Savoy talks about the Real being a vital component of American Gothic by drawing on the Lacanian concept of the Real. For Lacan, “the Real is that which lies outside the Symbolic process, and it is to be found in the mental as well as in the material world: a trauma, for example, is [like sudden physical dissolution] intractable and unsymbolizable” (qtd. in Savoy 169). This presentation of the Real in the American Gothic is linked to the terrible past of America and is peculiarly significant considering the innovative form that American Gothic is. As Savoy asserts, the Gothic becomes an important instrument to know that past of America that is simultaneously attractive and repulsive. Savoy regards Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798), a seminal Gothic text as presenting the claims of the past on the present. For Savoy, *Wieland* is an exposition of the anxieties that pervade the unstable American nation, where the individual loses power over common sense and reason and history takes the front seat. It is a narrative that recounts the visitation of father’s sins on the children and is firmly rooted in history. Hawthorne’s Gothic works also invoke American Puritanism. His *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is a representation of the atrocities committed against women. The preface to this novel “The Custom House”, explains about the haunted house that is deemed by Savoy as being “swarming with ghosts” (Savoy 177). Savoy deems that this text carries immense importance in the canon of the American Gothic, because no real ghosts are present and haunting is evoked by means of metaphor and similes. Hawthorne linked the Gothic with political scenario and soon Edgar Allan Poe followed him. Poe’s Gothic tales specializing in creating in the reader a sense of “acute claustrophobia” (Savoy 181) and are especially significant for bringing the sense of “blackness” in American fiction. This observation makes Toni Morrison say that “no early American writer is more important to the concept of African Americanism than Poe” (Savoy 182). A lot of his work focuses on oppression by the white culture, not directly referring to slavery, but nevertheless portraying the white race as perpetrators of “monstrous acts” (Savoy 182). His characters are driven towards morbid thoughts as a result of intense melancholia. The figure of the corpse is of immense significance in Poe’s narratives for it suggests the return of the dead. The above analysis evinces that the Gothic novel in America is deeply connected to the history that in turn is always real. Hence, American Gothic endorses a new version of the Gothic novel that is not divorced from, but is intimately engaged with the real.
The presence of the Gothic and realism at once in the African-American Gothic bespeaks of its connections with the slave narratives. It is a limited and conservative approach towards reading the Gothic that creates a yawning chasm between realism and Gothic. By implication, early critics of the Gothic rarely regarded slave narratives as Gothic, thus minimizing any interaction between the two genres. The presentation of slaves as subjected to the same treatment as brutes, and the portrayal of slave masters as monsters are basic characteristics of slave narratives that make them terrifying and infused with reality at once. Richard Wright, the writer of *Native Son* (1940) writes in his essay “How Bigger was Born”,

> We do have in the Black the embodiment of a past tragic enough to appease the spiritual hunger of even a James; and we do have in the oppression of the Black a shadow athwart our national life dense and heavy enough to satisfy even the gloomy broodings of a Hawthorne. And if Poe were alive, he would not have to invent horror; horror would invent him (Wright).

Wright in these lines makes a strong case for the presence of Gothicism in works of Black writers even if they write about the quotidian. Also he likens the horror in the works of stalwarts of American Gothic literature from Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, to the works of slave narratives. Slave narratives also perform the subversive function of the Gothic literature by vilifying the whites. Goddu explicates how in The Bondwoman’s Narrative, Hanna Craft presents Mr. Trappe, the white man who traded in slaves, as a person associated with blackness. He wore “dark clothes” and had “darker eyes” and was depicted as a shadow that darkened many lives, Goddu asserts. As Goddu further holds

> Rather than uncouple ‘blackness’ from its Gothic referents, Crafts resituates the discourse in relation to the white body, thereby exposing the fictionality not only of race but also of the Gothic’s racialised narratives of dread upon which racial discourse depends. Trappe’s ‘blackness’ exposes to white culture its own illegitimacy: its complicity in the crime of slavery as well as its use of black bodies to project and proxy its own moral guilt (Spooner 67).

Thus slavery not only affected the blacks but also the whites adversely.
Through the presentation of realism in Hurston’s work, the analysis wishes to point towards a new direction that Hurston took American Gothic. Teresa Goddu studies how slavery is represented in the terms of the Gothic in novels. Whereas some writers, according to Goddu, present slavery as it is, others change it into the form of fiction and in turn effect a displacement of slavery. However, even when such displacement occurs, the presence of fiction does not dilute the impact of the history. History remains intrinsic to such fictional narratives as well. This intertwining of the Gothic and the real is made possible because, as Theodore Gross pertinently points out,

Black writing has instinctively adopted the Gothic tradition of American literature and given its more supernatural and surrealistic characteristics a realistic basis, founded on actual lives often lived in the Gothic manner, that is indeed terrifying: the nightmare world of Poe or Hawthorne has become the Monday morning of the Negro author (Gross 184).

It is the portrayal of the demoniac in the human mind and soul that Black writing in the Gothic genre is fundamentally concerned with. This diabolism rests in the Southern landscape that is stained with the blood of innumerable blacks. The evil energy of the South has the capacity to transform even gentle people in to blood sucking vampires and callous monsters. Kari J. Winters draws attention to the idea that it was not suddenly that Gothic came to be aligned with slavery. She throws light on the fact that the early Gothic writers such as Monk Lewis and William Beckford either owned slaves or supported slavery. Also, Winters points out, writers of Gothic works like William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, participated in debate about abolition. Thus, slavery has since long participated in the history of the Gothic novel and was represented by it. Many events of slave uprisings were turned into Gothic tales, and as Goddu indicates, many leaders such as Nat Turner were deemed as monsters. Such tales displayed all the stock traits of Gothic narratives such as “terror of possession, the iconography of imprisonment, the fear of retribution and the weight of sin...by which to represent the scene of America’s greatest guilt: slavery” (Goddu 133). Such presentations of the uprisings lead by Nat Turner, Goddu explicates, throws light on how the event was represented by writers using the Gothic mode, rendering the account both real as well as unreal. With the writers’ imagination, the real event acquires Gothic proportions and acquires symbolic dimensions. Goddu gives the example of *American Slavery as It Is* (1839), in which Theodore Weld
presents slavery in full horror by presenting slaves in chains. In his presentation of slavery, Weld turns it more into an event of symbolic dimensions. An instance of this can be seen in Sarah Grimke’s account of her enslaved condition:

As I left my native state on account of slavery, and deserted the home of my fathers to escape the sound of the lash and the shrieks of tortured victims, I would gladly bury in oblivion the recollection of those scenes with which I have been familiar; but this may not be, this cannot be; they come over my memory like gory specters, and implore me with restless power, in the name of a God of mercy, in the name of a crucified Savior, in the name of humanity; for the sake of slaveholder, as well as the slave, to bear witness to the horrors of the Southern prison house (qtd. in Goddu 135).

Grimke, here, comes across as any Gothic maiden running away from the ghosts of an enslaved past. Also, the horror here not limited to Grimke alone, it is extended to all those who have witnessed the horror of slavery – slave masters and slaves alike. Harriet Beech Stowe also in her preface to *Dread* (1856), sees slavery as a feudal institution, full of immense possibilities for Gothicism. Claims of slave writers like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs strengthen the relationship of the real and imaginary in their Gothic narratives. Such narratives also unsettle the images of the victim and the victimizer for the readers. The figure of the Gothic villain is the white slave master and the Gothic heroine is the black slave woman. As Goddu pertinently notes, “Douglass signifies against white narratives of Gothic spectatorship” (Goddu 137). In a very telling account of Douglass’, we see that “Douglass deploys the Gothic with a twist; instead of waking *from* the nightmare, he wakes *to* it” (Goddu 139 emphasis original),

I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an aunt of mine, whom he [the slavemaster] used to tie upto a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood” (qtd. in Goddu 139).

Thus, in producing the Gothic effect, the slave narratives are used by Douglass to present his side of the story. This practice is opposed to the notion that the Gothic and the real cannot co-exist, or that Gothic is simply divorced from reality. Its affiliation with the history is not incidental but intentional to mirror the real-life horrors of
slavery. In Harriet Jacobs’ tale of her enslaved life as well, she writes of slavery as a monster where the inhabitants and the perpetrators of this system are “fiends who bear the shape of men” (2). Gothic narratives are also characterized by repetition and excess and Jacobs’ account of the terrors of slavery are indeed characterized by such instances. Goddu points out how even after giving a catalogue of horrors associated with slavery again and again, Jacobs always adds that this was not an adequate description as the horrors of slavery were innumerable. Her narrative in which she is constantly in danger from her lustful master reads like “a typical female Gothic plot” (147) says Goddu. The demon that the master is portrayed as is manifested in his ubiquitous and ominous presence around herself. It is also seen how Jacobs resists continuously the advances of her master by using her intelligence and wisdom. Rather than being kept as a sexual prisoner, she chooses to bury herself in a garret “nine feet long and seven feet wide...There was no admission for either light or air” (114) which she describes as “dungeon, a torture chamber, a prison, a grave” (127). Her seven years of entrapment in the garret had a crippling effect in her body. Giving evidence for her troubled body thereafter, she asks the readers to confirm this from her family members in New York and Boston. After her confinement as she comes back many of her friends and family members see her as coming back from the dead. This implies, as Goddu explicates “Jacobs underscores the events behind all Gothic effects...[she] demonstrates how the supernatural is based in institutionalized threats of power” (149). She outmaneuvers her master but in doing so she herself continues being the one who is afraid and endangered. Also, her narrative chooses to depict the whole American nation – both the South and the north as sites of enslavement. She tries to ascertain the cause of the continuing slavery and finds it in the silence of those who are bound. Her ability to “haunt back” (Goddu152), stems from her power of representation and her ability to lift the veil from the face of slavery.

Turning to Zora Neale Hurston who was a trained anthropologist, a hoodoo doctor and a prolific writer, brought up in the all-Black town of Eatonville Florida, we witness some of the most prominent concerns of American Gothic in her works. Her career received an upsurge during the Harlem Renaissance (about 1919 to early or mid-1930s) as she achieved a lot as a writer who depicted the Black life in all its authenticity. This achievement of hers, however, became more notable after her anonymous death and subsequent discovery of her grave by Alice Walker. She
received many accolades specifically for writing in the same dialect in which the blacks spoke in the rural South. Hurston began her writing career with short stories and dramas. Some of her plays written in during her early career are “De Turkey and de Law: A Comedy in Three Acts,” “Forty Yards,” “Lawing and Jawing,” “Meet the Mamma: A Musical Play in Three Acts,” “The Mule-Bone: A Comedy of Black Life in Three Acts,” “Poker!,” “Polk County: A Comedy of Black Life on a Sawmill Camp with Authentic Black Music in Three Acts,” “Spunk” (also the title of the short story she published in The New Black), and “Woofing”. Her *Mules and Men* (1935) is known to be one of the authentic works on Black folklore. Hurston earned the honour of being the most published black woman writer during 1930s. Also she received many prestigious prizes and awards such as Rosenwald Foundation Fellowship, two Guggenheims, an Honorary Doctor of Letters Degree from Morgan State College, an Anisfeld-Wolf Book Award in Race Relations, the Howard University Distinguished Alumni Award, Bethune-Cookman College’s Award for Education and Human Relations. Ironically, at the later stage of her life, she suffered a considerable decline in her life and career to die alone in a home for the impoverished. Academia (at that time comprising of a majority of male critics) ignored the works of Zora Neale Hurston till Alice Walker found her unmarked grave and there was a revived interest in Hurston’s works during the times when black feminism was much in vogue.

The scene of the Harlem Renaissance was characterized by writers such as James Baldwin, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Richard Wright, who strove to write literature that represented blacks in the face of white dominance. The movement arose as a reaction to many depictions of the blacks as malicious, violent, brutish were considered by black writers as wrongful depictions. Lovalerie King explains that in novels such as *The Clansman* (1905) and films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), both of which were great success, the blacks were shown to be barbaric, a threat to the civilized American society, while the Ku Klux Klan was portrayed as the savior of the country. The early years of the twentieth were tumultuous for the blacks owing to the Jim Crow laws, racial riots and the Great Migration to the north. The Harlem Renaissance was a movement of celebration for all the blacks as what came to the Jazz Age also begun. Alain Locke was one of the founding fathers of the movement who sought to depict and endorse the depiction of the “new black” in works by Black writers. Hurston through her various works,
wished to downplay the racial problems in her works and to depict the everyday life of the blacks, so that the oppressors become aware of the humanity of the oppressed. Among her contemporaries her works were not given its due credit and as Lovarie King says were “often trivialized as entertainment, and minstrelsy, rather than serious literary achievement” (King 107). Hurston’s writings stem from the orality of African and African-American culture. The ‘folk’ pervaded most of the space in her writings, with rural beliefs, lifestyle and most importantly rural language occupying the center stage. Tiffany Ruby Patterson appropriately holds that her works provide a great insight into the lives of the blacks living in the rural South in the early twentieth century. Through the Gothic mode Hurston’s works became a means of subversion and resistance. As the voice of resistance, Hurston presented her works with a clear philosophy of championing the downtrodden - blacks and women in her case. Her works sought to point towards adversities of racial, sexual and economic exploitation. And most importantly her works depicted the black people in a world of their own. Patterson rightly explicates

Her contrarian gaze moved black people to the center of inquiry, establishing them as subjects, a place reserved for white people in the dominant race-relations paradigm in African American history and thought (6).

The study seeks to extend Patterson’s notion to suggest that Hurston depicted the influence/oppression of the white on blacks through the representation of the blacks. This representation took place in two ways – through the depiction of those blacks who retained their indigenous beliefs and the other category of blacks who were corrupted under the influence of values that characterized white materialism. The blacks who were innocent, unharmed by any intrusion of greed or superiority were opposite to those who were under the influence of false values of whites. Hurston scorned the members of her own race who chose to belong to the black literati (called Niggerati by Hurston), due to their stiff-upper lip attitude, and for their ignorance of the reality of black lives in the South. This individualism characterizes not only Hurston’s life but her works as well.

Through the lens of the Gothic, sexual politics, violence and presentation of beliefs like hoodoo and voodoo, attain a more sophisticated standard, not attained by her contemporaries. Hurston brings in her craft an intense engagement with many things
that are of African origin. This rendition of the African heritage situates her works in a class apart from many writers of early and contemporary Gothic. Her evoking of ancient beliefs and myths connect Africa with American concerns and the use of Gothic therein acquires a unique dimension. Wall opines that Hurston chose not to blame slavery for everything including the circumstances of Blacks during the postbellum era. However, I choose to differ from this idea, as much negativity that we see in Hurston’s works has roots in slavery. Thus, Hurston might not have been very clear about the origin of the plight of the rural folk in her works, these evils largely stem from the enslavement of the blacks. Hurston was not as vocal in her works as Richard Wright was, in her presentation of what we call racial politics or protest against racial politics. Often white publishers and white patrons censored her works. A superficial glimpse at her work gives the reader the impression of her being a writer who sought to depict only the everyday life of black folk in the rural South. Accused of being someone who betrayed her race, Hurston’s involvement of racial politics in her works is not that simplistic. Most importantly, as I try to assert in this work, her racial politics and her portrayal of oppression of the blacks assumes different dimensions through the use of the Gothic. It is through the inclusion of this genre, that much anger and agony of being oppressed comes across in a potent form.

Through this study I aim to raise issues such as the role of African-American writers in the Gothic and the American Gothic. Next, I wish to situate Hurston in the realm of the Gothic, with which her association has not been explored much. Also I seek to clarify Hurston’s position in the canon of American Gothic fiction and as establish her as a literary forerunner of black female writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, particularly in the oeuvre of American and African-American Gothic. To fulfill all these aims my research seeks to establish the literature written by Hurston as primarily Gothic, an area which has only been explored in bits and pieces. Chapter two of this thesis is a detailed analysis of Hurston’s first two novels *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1933) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, Hurston’s first novel takes inspiration from Hurston’s own personal life as she portrays through this work a dysfunctional family system, the issue of miscegenation and mulatto existence, zombification through slavery that continues even after its abolition, and the trope of the spilt self. Through the figure of John, the preacher and the sinner, Hurston seeks to render the effects of slavery in its long-lasting nature.
Janie’s predicament as a mulatto woman of the rural South is presented in Their Eyes Were Watching God, where the narrative highlights the horrors faced by a black woman. This part is primarily an investigation of the Gothic tropes used by Hurston as she wrote her masterpiece that is most often seen as a novel of black affirmation and black cheerfulness. For this I have analyzed the use of marital Gothic, claustrophobia, miscegenation and black worship of white attitude throughout the book so that it presents the black South in all its horror.

Chapter three analyzes the later novels of Hurston i.e., Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939) and Seraph on the Suwanee (1948). In Moses, the building of nation by the eponymous character Moses is called into question using the Gothic angle to look at the process of nation building. Gender oppression and tyrannical rule by Moses is something that Hurston foregrounded in the novel. Seraph on the Suwanee is a peculiar novel in itself because Hurston who was seen as a champion of the blacks wrote a novel with white characters. However, the white characters in the book belong to the class of ‘crackers’, looked down upon by the elite whites. Hurston presents in this novel the threat posed to the American nation by various Eugenics theorists who blamed the cracker class for corrupting the nation. Another issue that acquires Gothic dimensions in this work is the marital relationship of the protagonist Arvay, whose marital life can be seen as sado-masochistic. Arvay’s mentally challenged son is another presence in the novel that needs to be examined from the perspective of the Gothic.

Chapter four examines Hurston’s minor and early works – her short stories and a play with Gothic theme. This analysis supports the earlier chapter and corroborates that it is not only in her major works but also in her early and minor works that Hurston could not evade the Gothic nature of African-American existence. Among the stories examined in this chapter include some stories that are celebrated and famous while some others have been overlooked by scholars and critics. “Sweat”, “Gilded Six-Bits”, “Black Death”, “Muttsy” and “Uncle Monday” are the stories that display the horrendous side of the South. In the next part of this chapter I have analyzed Hurston’s play Color-Struck (1925) in which the evil practice of colourism infuses in the black protagonist Emma the pathological state of being a paranoid and delusional person. The analysis also focuses on the issue of racism, colourism and the Jim Crow
laws that evinced that even after the abolition of slavery, the bonded nature of Blacks has not ceased to exist.

The last chapter concludes by trying to substantiate Hurston’s largely unrecognized contribution in the sphere of Gothic literature. The study attempts to postulate the manner in which Hurston fused various Gothic tropes and themes to reconfigure the American Gothic, and construct a brand of her own.