Chapter II

“Southern Trees Bear Strange Fruit”1: Early Novels

Zora Neale Hurston was an ambassador of the blacks in the rural South and through her works she revealed, “an underground world of peasant cosmology that terrified and embarrassed the elite” (Patterson 8). She sought to represent in her works the dissensions within the black community, which in turn had terrifying effects. The roots of this behaviour lay in the profoundly immoral practice of slavery that crippled the people of the South not only through physical violence, but through leaving the psychological scars of this violence. Ruth D. Weston cites Judith Wilt who asserts the importance of setting in any Gothic narrative. She rightly points out that more than the “plot, image or mood”, it is the place, the setting of a Gothic tale that is to be approached as the “place of mystery, the area in which the land begins to change, or seems to begin to change...[suggesting] the extreme instability of the material world as perceived...[, perhaps] as it exists in itself” (qtd. in Weston 3). The American South provided this site of terror and horror to Hurston. To render the horror associated with the existence of the Southern folk, Hurston chose the vehicle of the Gothic.

In its tremendous ability to voice cultural anxieties, the Gothic was a potent medium for Hurston to show how the South of America is a defiled pastoral land. Though the writers of the South present images of magnolias, the real picture was quite different from it. It is this defiled, tarnished and degraded South which forms the subject matter of the Gothic narrating the ugliness of the South. Patricia Yaegar asserts that the literary haunting that is associated with the South is “not just what haunts the reader in the aftermath of a story or a novel, but the almost invisible force of everyday haunting, the trauma of living neither in the epic nor the extraordinary but in the everyday South” (Yaegar 97). She is of the view that rather than being thrilled with experiencing a Gothic tale, the readers should be able to feel that beneath the humdrum of everyday life haunting is taking place. Though a lot of African-American writers of the Gothic genre show the South as land of beauty, they cannot conceal the fact in their texts that the South is largely a place where beneath the order there is great turmoil and turbulence. Slavery in the South is a practice which ever after being abolished continued in the early nineteenth century. Wester talks about how on one
hand, in Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*, we see the grandeur of the buildings of college campus, but on the other hand there are is a mention of the “insane asylum” (Ellison 34). Also there are vivid descriptions of cabins surrounded by empty fields, a sluggish river covered by algae, and shacks which are shrunk due to the heat of the sun. Images such as these portrayed by the writers of the South reinforce the fact that though a Southern writer dreams of a pastoral and idyllic world,

the unspeakable and repressed story of black sexual transgression is written in the Southern landscape itself...the entirety of the South proves to be a wild and ruined “home” that hints at a terrible part of sexual violation, gross abuses of authority, and criminal disenfranchisement, much like the haunted houses of the traditional Gothic (Wester 109).

The writers of the African-American Gothic also suggest that liberation from the disastrous effects of slavery may not be attainable. Who might lead this liberation, or how it may occur are questions that were still unanswered during the early twentieth century. As Wester opines, such writers also imply through their works as to how the struggle to escape from the past may be an endless cycle.

*Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1933)

Hurston’s first novel, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1933) has its roots in the biblical story of Jonah. God calls on Jonah to deliver a message of repentance to the wicked inhabitants of Nineveh. He flees from this call, but has to face God at sea, where he is delivered from the belly of a whale. After this, he fulfills God’s command, but he is angry at the opportunity provided to the wicked inhabitants of Nineveh for redemption. God gives him a gourd vine to protect him and next day, the gourd dies as God releases a worm to do so. Jonah faints in absence of shade and when he wakes up, God makes him realize that just as he depends on God’s grace, the inhabitants of Nineveh, though wicked, also deserve an opportunity to redeem themselves. Hence, the motif of decay and degeneration is very much a part of this biblical story which Hurston used for her first novel.

One of the most pertinent Gothic trope that is noticeable in the novel is that of the zombie. Hurston’s works are primarily examples of realistic Gothic fiction. Hence, to expect gory monsters with wounds and decaying bodies is not advisable. The
presence of horror in the life of people in the South is very much a part of everyday living. Wade Davis attributes the origin of the word zombie to the Angolian term nzumbe, i.e., a ghost or spirit of a dead person. In Congo and African terms, as Ackermann and Gauthier held, the word could be related with a corpse or a body without a soul. Later the word metamorphosed into the English word zombie. Kylie William Bishop in her book-length study on the zombies in the American Gothic examines the origin, participation and the terror of zombie as found in America. As Jerrold E. Hogle opines, Gothic fiction helps us address and deal with “some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, for the most internal and mental to the widely social and culture (Hogle iii). A much sensationalized category of monsters and ghosts pervading the realm of the Gothic, zombies, as per Bishop, are one of the most unique members of the monster genus. Zombies exaggerate the Gothicism associated with America because of their close affinity with decay and degeneration. She further states,

By forcing viewers to face their greatest fears concerning life and decay, freedom and enslavement, prosperity and destruction, the zombie narrative provides an insightful look into the darkest heart of modern society as it is now or as it might become (Bishop 32).

These Gothic figures express anxieties regarding various poignant events in the history. Consequently, the figure of the zombie is also instrumental in voicing certain concerns specifically central to African-American Gothic. Zombies cannot be reduced to mere dead bodies or a source of sensationalism as represented in various zombie movies. Rather, the zombies have great significance in both folkloric and ideological sense. The zombies, according to Bishop, are the only supernatural creatures who have some this worldly form. In the context of the present study, zombies and their origin acquires great prominence, as zombies, as per Bishop, can be considered,

a complex and relevant cultural artifact, a fusion of elements from the “civilized” New World and mystical ancient Africa. Indeed, it is a creature born of slavery, oppression and capitalist hegemony and in that way a manifestation of collective unconscious fears and taboos (Bishop 37).
Also, zombies are particularly related to America, as other kinds of Gothic beings such as vampires or werewolves can be found in European cultural history as well. Hence, its relation to American and African-American Gothic is noteworthy.

Zombies are also important to the African-American Gothic due to their folkloric roots. The zombies are creations of voodoo. In their detailed study on zombies cited by Bishop, Hans W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, establish the link of zombies with African tradition to the accounts of dead people coming alive in Benin, Zambia, Tanzania and Ghana. In such places, the sorcerers used the zombies as slaves. Also, these writers found a connection between the zombie tradition and the folklore of Caribbean Islands. Bishop attempts to trace history of zombies before they came to America, as this helped in reading the use of zombies in the American Gothic more clearly. Her study shows the roots of the zombie tradition in the island of Haiti. This location was particularly significant as Haiti represented a mingling of Christianity with African rituals and belief system – the mingling of the religions of slave and slaves owners. Hence, zombies came to manifest the notion that the human soul can be manipulated by black magic and zombies also served the “allegorical function as a metaphor for enslavement”(Bishop 46). Haiti was also significant for any writer of the Gothic because the Haitian Revolution of 1791 has been regarded as an event represented in Gothic terms by many writers. The Haitian revolution was followed by thirteen years of bloodshed by the black slaves who were hitherto unable to free themselves from the clutches of slavery. In his detailed analysis of the Gothic narratives about the Haitian revolution, Clavin opines that in their employment of the ruins of St. Dominigue, the bloodthirsty black slaves with vampire-like characteristics, white slave-owners committing monstrous brutalities and the readers becoming voyeurs in the act of horrific deeds, the writers of the horror narratives of the Haitian revolution provided many African-American writers and American writers the substance to revise their Gothic narratives. Zombification in any text also infuses it with the elements of post colonialism. As Punter opines,

Emerging out of the myths of the walking dead associated with the voodoo religion of Haiti, the zombie is initially most obviously identified with slavery, allowing for a critique of colonialism, and is frequently used this way in postcolonial Gothic texts (Punter 264)
Hence, Haiti and its history lend the genre of American Gothic (a dynamic and always evolving category) various characteristics that enrich it and widen its domain. It can be seen that the American and the African-American Gothic is much indebted to Haiti for adding to its œuvre.

Hurston’s association with the zombies was not only limited to her works of fiction only. She was a trained ethnographer and worked under Franz Boas. During her ethnographic study that she compiled in the form of *Tell My Horse* (1938), Hurston, wrote about many practices of voodoo and hoodoo. She called the zombies “the bodies without souls. The living dead.” She was quick to segregate the American experience of death with the African-American one saying that for the urban American population, death and graveyard are final, but in Haiti, “there is the quick, the dead, and then there are Zombies” (Hurston 179). Her accounts suggested that plantation owners bought zombie labour from the voodoo doctors practicing black magic. Under the influence of black magic, the soul was first taken out of the body and was later restored to “work ferociously and tirelessly without consciousness of his surroundings and condition and without memory of his former state” (Hurston 183).

As an ethnographer, Hurston was always mingling with the people ready to learn and notice whatever came her way and was fearlessly adventurous. She recounts various renowned cases of such zombification. To her credit is what she claims to be a photograph of a zombie, “the case of Felicia Felix-mentor” (Hurston 182), found in a hospital. She recounts the sight as being “dreadful. That blank face with the dead eyes” (Hurston 195). Often the fate of the zombies was always filled with such horror, while the *bocors* who control them live, they function as slaves, after the death of their *bocors*, many are disowned by their widows and often wander about. Thus, zombies are part of the modern and postmodern discourse about the ambivalence of authors while representing monsters. The system that turns people into zombies i.e., colonialism is vilified and the zombies that turn into monsters are presented as victims in contemporary works of fiction. David Punter holds that such narratives locate the horror in the system/society, rather than in the monster itself. Such fiction, as Punter holds, participates into that Gothic discourse that was initiated by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* by presenting the perspective of the monster.

The horror of being turned into a zombie, as Bishop suggests, intervenes with the forces of nature. It also represents a violation of God’s law, as one’s eternal rest after
death is turned into a life of piteous slave labour and “being forced to work as a mindless slave represents a fate far worse than death itself” (qtd. in Bishop 53). As she seeks to investigate the ideological association with zombies, she regards that zombies represent the repressive forms of law, the local religious practices and the structure of Haiti. Because of the collective guilt associated with slavery in America, zombies came to play a crucial part in the Gothic narratives about America. She points out that for an American, the terror associated with the Gothic arose “in the prospect of a Westerner becoming dominated, subjugated, symbolically raped, and effectively “colonized” by the pagan representatives” (Bishop 66). And zombies, she suggests are the ideal new World terror because they are inextricably linked to hegemony, and oppression. Being turned into a zombie, one is rendered without a self; without a soul and without autonomy at all. Bishop further suggests that zombies are the ultimate dream for the imperialist. Zombification manufactures such slaves, who are totally an entity having no thoughts, no aspirations and pose a threat to the colonialist. The process of making a zombie also reverses and subverts the power game as with the power of voodoo those who had power previously, could be turned into slaves losing all qualities of an independent self. These monsters are also figures of transgression as they hover on the borderlines of consciousness and unconsciousness. They neither belong to the world of the dead nor to that of the undead.

Hoodoo creeps slowly into Jonah’s Gourd Vine but manages to take the center stage soon after John loses his wife Lucy. John’s repeated sexual liaisons and his major affair with Hattie makes Hattie insecure about her grip on John. To tighten her hold over John she goes to An’ Dangie, a voodoo doctor. She uses her conjuring skills to make Lucy and John fight over Hattie saying in one of her charms, “Now fight! Fight and fuss until you part” (126). Here, hoodoo is invested with selfish interests and evil motives. Hurston as a writer of the American South was very much aware of hoodoo and voodoo playing an important part in the lives of the Southern population. John’s domestic life, already a troubled one, turns upside down soon after this particular spell. A big quarrel ensues between John and Lucy. In the heat of the moment John does, what he never did to Lucy and slap her,

There was a resounding smack. Lucy covered her face with her hand and John drew back in a sort of horror. (JGV 129)
This fight ending in a violent action, though meager by the standards of Gothic horror, should be interpreted in the light of various facts – John early adoration and literal worship of Lucy considering himself a lesser mortal, his position as a preacher and a Moderator of State Association, and the animal within himself that he has been trying to suppress. Perhaps this horror is reflected aptly in the words of a shocked and much aggrieved Lucy as she says, “uh person kin be killed ‘thout being stuck un blow”(130). As Lucy lies on her death bed, John avoids being with her,

He was afraid lest she should die while he was asleep and he should awake to find her spirit standing over him (JGV 132).

The trope of zombification becomes horrifying towards the latter half of the novel. After Lucy’s death, we see John married to Hattie within three months of Lucy’s death. The townspeople and John’s friends are totally against this marriage and call Hattie “Dat strumpet”. The readers are informed soon after that John, immensely affected by Hattie’s tactics,

“eben drawed eh knife on yo’ son, ‘cause he tried tuh keep dah strumpet out his mama’s feathery bed dat she gave tuh li’l Isis oh her deathbed.”(JGV 138)

Here we see how John is turned into a zombie due to Hattie and An’ Dangie’s voodoo practices. Hattie is cautious so that what happened to Lucy should not happen to her. And for this she resorts to the powers of hoodoo. Nine long years pass and after this time leap in the novel, what the readers witness is “[t]ales of weakness, tales of vice hung around John Pearson’s graying head” (141). Dayan stresses on the immense parallelism that exists between the condition of a zombie and a slave as specter of a zombie is covering without a soul, sans any freedom, however little and “is the ultimate sign of loss and dispossession” (qtd, in Bishop 47). This is exactly what we witness in John’s plight. For nine long years, under the influence of An’ Dangie’s hoodoo, he moves about like a slave with a bereft consciousness. The aimlessness and futility of labour seen in zombies is much visible in John. The notion that John was indeed zombified is proved to be true because after nine years of being a zombie, he suddenly regains consciousness once he sleeps away from his house. The first question he asks Hattie is
Hattie, whut am Ah doin’ married tuh you?...Look lak Ah been sleep. Ah never meant tuh marry you. Ain’t got no recollection uh even tryin’ tuh marry yuh, but here us is married, Hattie how come dat?...Look lak uh whole heap uh things been goin’ on in mah sleep (JGV 143).

As he comes to his senses, he also realizes that “Lucy lef seben chillun” who were not to be seen anywhere. Also “de whiskey bottles setting ‘round dis house. Dat didn’t useter be”(144). All these symptoms of John coming back to himself, though regarded nonchalantly in front of John, sets Hattie thinking if “de roots jus’ done wore out and done turn’d back on me” (144).

Being turned into a zombie also has a moral function. Evil seems to be triumphant while John is turned into a zombie for nine years. Virtue returns to some degree to the text only after John regains his consciousness. Thus, the monstrousness of being turned into a zombie carries with it the repercussions of crossing the line between the good and the evil, a theme most central to Gothic works. John on the other hand is absolutely horrified at these state of affairs, suddenly he is haunted by the ghost of Lucy, who, though dead, already shows the treatment meted out to black women by black men themselves. She haunts the household in the form of the guilt that plagues John’s mind day after day. The haunted house in inevitably aligned with female obliteration in the house. As Mary Chapman asserts,

The Gothic exposes the shortcomings of the ideology of separate spheres. The domestic enclosure the Gothic novel depicts is the inversion of the notion of home celebrated by separate spheres ideology: a place of imprisonment, torture, and threatened rape or death for its female heroines. The fiction that separate spheres ideology promotes – that the home is safe and overseen by benign maternal figures – in turn veils the operation of the paternal law (perhaps, more accurately, paternal lawlessness) within the private sphere...The characteristic absence of protective mothers from Gothic fiction bespeaks female powerlessness to control the domestic sphere that is actually regulated by male power (Savoy, 191).

Lucy, the only figure of virtue in the text is killed due to John’s callousness and violence. An apt example of a house that is familiar and yet horrifying for its mistress is Poe’s “The Black Cat”, in which the house becomes the site of terror, horror and
haunting. The story tells of domestic abuse in the house that has been unveiled and represents the tale of slavery in the American nation that cannot be hidden. The trope of ghost haunting a Southern household is used to its extreme by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, and we see a trace of it in Hurston’s book, making the readers aware that in the land of South the house is rarely a peaceful one.

As we study the use of the zombie figure in the story, what is inextricably linked to this zombification is the idea that zombies are figures of abjection. Abjection is another conspicuous trope used in the Gothic fiction especially about the American South. Abjection has close affinity with the South because it is a manifestation of the fact that this region is an evidence of the problematic history of America. Protagonists of Hurston’s novels are situated in a space where they form a part of the tragic Southern landscape. Just as nature is marred due to the evil of slavery, the individuals also cannot escape its ramifications. William P. Greenwood rightly says, “characters are all confined to an inevitable, tragic arc” (Greenwood 17). The Gothic is a genre that is a site of abjection, as all the fears, anxieties and desires that lie beneath the culture form the subject matter of Gothic literature. According to Kristeva, the abject has one central quality, “that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva 1). Abject, as Kristeva postulates is something that occupies neither the living nor the dead. She regard excrement, a wound, pus, menstrual blood as abject, something which emanates from the body, but must be taken out of one’s body so that a human may live in a healthy manner. It is something that disturbs the identity, system and order and threatens boundaries and rules. This abjection, according to Kristeva, is needed to define our own selves, projecting the corruption onto the abject figure.

The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them (Kristeva 16)

As Julia Kristeva opines, abjection is textually represented through transgressive ideas. This helps an individual recognize and acknowledge the division in their own identity. It is through the Gothic that the individual is confronted with “the possibility of encountering the terrifying components of the repressed unconscious, a process that shatters the illusion of coherent subjectivity” (Martin and Savoy 174). For Kristeva, such breaking of the concept of a unified identity is ecstatic for the
individual as the notion of such coherence in identity is, as Noble regards, “hegemonic” (Savoy 174). David Jarraway explicates the connection between Gothic works and abjection.

The mysterious darkness and horrific suspense of the Gothic narrative tells us that, in a sense, we never do get past our depressive melancholy, that the reality of abjection will always exceed even our best imaginative efforts to symbolize it (Savoy 65).

Miles asserts that the early Gothic had beasts or monstrous figures to concretize the darkness of the civilized society. Early American Gothic often represented the black as the Other, the abject - one who contains those values of white society that are undesirable, unwanted and corrupting. Teresa Goddu relates Kristeva’s abject to signify slavery as this is a part of the American history which “disrupts the dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history” (Goddu 10). And this abject state is much visible in the Gothic literature about the South. Just like the concept of the abject, the Gothic aids in maintaining an identity of the nation and also disturbs its existence. Her idea is much supported by many writers. For instance, Priscilla Wald in her Constituting America (1995) and Russ Castronovo in Fathering the Nation (1995), suggests that “untold stories” (Wald 4) or “bastard histories” (Castronovo 4), disrupt the national narrative. The spectacles of the picturesque and bountiful South is repeatedly perturbed by the horrors of slavery such as lynching, which portray, “a pastoral reverie ruptured by the specter of slavery” (Goddu 20). Goddu also puts forth the idea that the abject is so much a part of American Gothic that writers who choose to portray a picture of the South depict it as an Eden corrupted by the serpent of slavery whose poisonous effect reaches to even those who do not come into its contact directly.

The Gothic voices the stories, untold miseries and sufferings of two abject figures in the American history – the Indian and the Black. For this reason, the abject is a pivotal concern of American Gothic. As Maria M. Garcia Lorenzo also opines, “Gothic literature articulates abjection and cultural contradictions” (Lorenzo 45). Cultural transgression is a fundamental idea in the Gothic literature, which is
expressed through degeneration, and racial hybridities. The fear associated with
miscegenation directly translates into abjection of a figure who represents such fear.
When Miles calls the Gothic a “mode for representation of the fragmented subject”
(Miles 28), we can see an echo of his words in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*. Wester also
delves on the issue of monsters in Gothic fiction, a primary example of which is
*Frankenstein*. She, like Miles, endorses the idea that monsters presented the abject
figure which she regards as “the racial other” (Wester 14). In this monster, there was a
great rage and childlike innocence that suggested “an inherent bestiality lurking
somewhere” (Malchow 19), ready to raise its head against any atrocity committed
against it. Hence, Wester also draws attention to the notion that the voices those
anxieties through abjection that actually “pervade the body politic in its entirety”
(Wester 24).
When Patrick West explicates abjection “as the simultaneous horrified and ecstatic
recognition by the subject that what lies without also lies within, and that to be one is
also to be other” (qtd. in McGlasson 22), we can see this directly in relation with the
novel. Abjection also brings into consideration that two parts of the self exist, hence
making the self fragmented. Eric Savoy in his seminal work on the American Gothic
ascertains that

The entire tradition of American Gothic can be conceptualized as the attempt
to invoke “the face of the tenant” – the specter of Otherness that haunts the
house of national narrative (Savoy, 14).

*Jonah’s Gourd Vine* can be seen as a book where the protagonist seems to be divided
into two selves. This fulfills one of the primary functions of Gothic literature – to
voice the unspeakable. As Sedgwick opines “the most characteristic energies of the
Gothic novel concern the impossibility of restoring to their original oneness
characters divided from themselves” (qtd. in Holland 331). This indicates that the
division of the self is a chief concern of the Gothic literature. For Savoy such invasion
by the Other is denoted by a house that is the site where the Other who was repressed,
returns. John’s abject self is in conflict with the spiritual community that he is the
caretaker of, his wife and the Church. He is in a perpetual tussle between his instincts
and the religion of the American South. Anthony Wilson narrates how two disruptive
forces in the novel challenge John.
first, the mingling of African religion with Lucy’s Orthodox Christianity, which imposes strictures on John’s sexuality and subjectivity even as it empowers him and makes him a man; and second, the encroachment of the outside world, the enabling of travel, and the destruction of community embodied in the symbol of the train. (Wilson 65)

Hence, we see that Lucy distinguishes between the two sides of John’s self – one, socially acceptable and the other abject. In a world where historical forces are at work, Hurston shows that the individual (here John) can do little to prevent the catastrophe that follows. This duplicity of his existence becomes more tormenting as he realizes that his relationship with Lucy has its foundation in his soul. And in contrast, his liaisons with other women are based in his physical desire. Early in the novel we see that,

Handlin’ Big ‘Oman, Lacey, Semmie, Bootsie and Mehaley merely called for action, but with Lucy he needed words and words he did not have (JGV 32)

Early in their relationship, the slightest of inappropriate language from John makes Lucy think of him as someone who uses inappropriate language and teaches a lesson to him that in order to woo her, he will have to keep his African sensuality to himself.

In trying to please her, John begins the profound separation of the physical and linguistic, intellectual and spiritual aspects of himself. For Hurston, this division will become the central tragedy of his life, as the physical, quarantined from all that John considers good and sacred, will devolve into the sum total of his inassimilable sexual urges: “de brute beast in me (Wilson 71).

Though it is Lucy only who guards John and his spirituality all along, she also lays the foundation of the duality in him. Lucy and her restrictive community also influences John’s preaching prowess and the idea of sexual intercourse as sin, is also introduced to him by Lucy. Her community is probably devoid of the sense that John like all of them is a human being in spite of all his fiery and intense sermons. Hence, all that Lucy seeks to do seems quite unattainable. “the linguistic John and the physical John exist on separate and irreconcilable planes” (Wilson 68).

West draws our attention towards an incident early in the novel where there is an episode about John killing a serpent much dreaded by the whole community. This
elevates his position in the community as a man of divine inspiration. Lucy is greatly impressed with this feat and cannot have enough words to praise him. West opines that a snake is a creature endowed with supernatural powers in New World Africanism. It is revered in African culture because the two ends of its body forms a circle indicating that the dead ancestors continue the life circle. However, in Christianity or western beliefs, a snake is seen as an evil creature. Lucy, here, seems to be influenced by both belief systems and she is at the same time is in awe of the snake and sees it as demonic. Spiesman aptly suggests that, “Both the death of the snake at the creek and the first appearance of the train seem to be forewarning of the disasters that later occur” (Spiesman 90). West also, quite poignantly, draws attention towards the idea that this seemingly victorious incident is actually a foreboding of John’s ruination. John unknowingly enters an arena where no member of the community hitherto dared to venture. This aggressiveness of John’s, “has broken the cycle, and while Lucy celebrates his momentary victory, John ultimately cannot find peace of balance in his life” (West 155). John’s abject self come to the fore in a marked way once they move to Florida for new opportunities. Horror and dread due to John’s debauchery arises because as Sedgwick opines

The inside life and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners [which creates] a doubleness where singleness should be (qtd. in Savoy 14).

Though Lucy has a house of her own now, and John starts to get established as a preacher, his repeated sexual liaisons categorize him as a hypocrite preacher. Barbara Creed suggests that abjection also occurs where the individual is a hypocrite and a liar. Abject things, according to Creed, are those that highlight that laws of the society are fragile and that there are things that lie on the other side of the border. Thus, this leads to what Sedgwick regards the worst form of violence, i.e., the split self. Her explication of the divided self rests on the notion of what is regarded as normal and the Other by the forces of regulation that create rigid boundaries. The Gothic brings to notice the consequences of crossing these boundaries. Richard Kearney asserts that the trope of the split self or the shadow indicate that an arbitrary wall has been placed between the self and something outside it, and that the self would be haunted with this excluded material. It is this incessant and persistent demand of the other in John that relegates him to being a sinner along with being a preacher. Kearney, while
examining the concept of the abject also goes on to suggest that abject is linked to “perversion and transgression” (Kearney 491). With reference to religion, he regards, abject is that which is polluted and that which needs to be purged. When ‘that’, which is suppressed by religious rules and regulations raises its head, its monstrosity lies in its extremity as it is, “so high, so maniac, so excessive and transgressive that it passes beyond being altogether.”(Keamey 492). This mania soon catches hold of John. the domestic ideal collapses before Lucy as she realizes that she has been repeatedly forgiving John for leaving her on the floor while in childbirth, leaving Isis on her deathbed, lets his children go hungry and is constantly inconstant. Here, we also see a black woman suffering because John, no longer a slave to a plantation owner, is still a slave to his abject self. After Lucy’s death, though John is haunted with guilt on the day of her death, the very next day he realizes that, “he was a free man having his will of women. He was glad in his sadness”(136). Hemenway opines that the cause for all of John’s troubles lies in “a deep cultural schism…the conflict between residual and dominant ideologies in the modernizing African-American community” (qtd in Watson 113). The American Gothic can be credited with the newer discourses of sex, race and gender coming to prominence through its perennially evolving form, something that Hurston’s manifests in her works every now and then.

After John wakes up from his condition as a zombie, John comes out from the clutches of the monstrous self and atones for Lucy’s death. However, he realizes that in marrying Hattie under a hoodoo spell, he has lost his family and his parish. Now, he again sees the figure of the snake in his dream and moves to Sanford, Marrying a rich widow, he regains his status as a preacher in a new church. However, once again, Hurston chooses to show that John’s Other part of the self cannot let him survive. He commits adultery once again. As he hopes to go back home with a sense of culpability and self-condemnation, his car collides with a train. Here again, the metaphor of the train – a symbol of John’s raging sexuality, explains that it is his abject sexual nature that is the cause of his doom. West is of the view that the appearance of the snake in the latter part of the novel is symbol of John’s life,

The snake seems to foretell the circularity of John’s experience: he is offered repeated opportunities to reconcile himself with the community, with God, with family, but John is self-consuming and too easily blinded by the glitter and structure of the material world. (West 160)
It can be easily said that horror in the novel arises because John is not only unable to appease with anyone else but also with his own self. Forever afflicted with the problems of his Other self, he is unable to harmonize his own nature.

John’s horrifying struggle with sexuality in the book can also be read in the light of Tomlinson’s *Animal Crossings*, where the writer focuses on the idea of animal haunting in Gothic literature. Kelly Hurley is also of the view that the Gothic literature deals with the in-between categories, “always-already in a state of indifferentiation, or undergoing metamorphoses into a bizarre assortment of human/not-human configurations” (Hurley 10). This animal haunting has various precedents in the works of American writers such as Poe (the black cat), Melville (the white whale) and Hurston herself in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (the rabid dog). Shedding light on this idea, Tomlinson writes

> An animal haunting … collapses both the spatial boundaries that maintain an exceptional human form against monstrous mutations, and temporal boundaries that attempt to rescue progress from an unholy, creeping origin (Tomlinson 37).

Though there is no visible animal on the outside with which John becomes infected and loses his humanity, this is “de brute beast” which John constantly refers to in the book. The chaotic noise of the train, which John hears for the first time, has some meaning for him. In this regard, the novel is an evidence of how John in order to conquer his world, loses his essential sanctity. Wilson calls the chaotic voice of the train, “the music of the Beast”. This ‘beast’ heralds modernity in John’s congregation and takes him away from the purity of the community, from Lucy. As he succumbs to the call of the beast within him, he loses his humanity, what to speak to his position as a god man. There is something in Lucy’s orthodox Christianity that cannot be reconciled with John’s idea of Christianity and he is continuously tempted into a demoniac side of self, i.e., of adulterous urges and destruction carnality. Alan Brown studies this aspect of the book and finds that Hurston in her books such as *Mules and Men* and *Dust Tracks on a Road* asserted that people in the South had to become “more animalistic…to surmount the same obstacles that the creatures of the swamp had to cope up with every day”(Brown 76). It is in light of such circumstances, says Brown, that John is defeated externally by nature, and internally by “De Beast” that
lives within him. Hurston gave an account of the ferocious animals who inhabited the swampy South “where bears and alligators raided hog-pens, wildcats fought with dogs in people’s yards, rattlesnakes as long as a man and as thick as a man’s forearm were found around back doors…” (Hurston 52). Brown also sees John as a man of nature who is physically strong and responds to the call of his body by associating with women. In projecting this side of John’s self, Brown insists that Hurston induced horrific characteristics in a black preacher figure, something that no black has been able to do. Lowe asserts that, “his sexual exploits do little more than enable him to ‘keep up with the pigs’ and the other animals in gargantuan sexual appetite” (qtd. in Wilson 73). Early in the novel, we see how John is affected by the ‘lingering specter of slavery’ (67). John is also a mulatto and is called “yaller God” by his stepfather Ned. This served as foreboding of how John would lead to the propagation of a new-world Christianity coupled with African rhythms. It is interesting to note how John comes to be bifurcated into these two selves- the human and the primitive beast. Early in the novel one sees the community rejoicing in the sound of the drums:

They called for the instrument they had brought to America in their shins – the drum – and they played upon it” (JGV 29).

Sexuality is largely a part of African life and African dances, points out Floyd, are integral in making the young boys and girls understand their role as adults. Even the idea of sin, as described by Floyd is unknown to African people. As he just enters into adolescence, he is unfamiliar with Christianity and its basic concepts. Only when he reaches the other side of the creek, does it dawn on him through Lucy that there is a gap between the physical self and spiritual self. It is now in this newfound world, where coloured people also wear shoes, he realizes that “the body becomes something to conceal and contains” (69).

The “yaller god” that Hurston presents in the novel’s first chapter will soon understand himself as an easy and irreconcilable mixture of man and beast” (Wilson 69).

The train is all its glory, looks like a great marvel to John and “the tangible embodiment of unbelievable power as well as serpentine sexual temptation” (75). John’s death by the train also indicates towards the beast becoming completely powerful at the end, when in spite of having a devoted wife and a flourishing church career for a second time, he indulges in sexual fling with another woman.
Along with these major Gothic tropes in the novel, some minor ones are also present to add to the dread of the South. These include the aftereffects of slavery on black families and the absence of a father figure in John’s life. Born as the consequence of a rape, John is neither accepted as a son by his biological father, Alf Pearson, or by the man who married his mother later on, Ned Crittendon. And much on the lines of what Claudia Raynard suggests that, “South is a strange land for the black adolescent” (Raynard 110), all he could see in the males around himself was constant domestic torment, non-commitment, and lack of affection. This absence of a positive male figure bequeaths on John, what Wilson calls, the legacy of a dysfunctional family system. As the novel begins, we witness the turbulent relationship between Amy and Ned Pearson. Ned is sulking for no reason while Amy not only works in the fields but also labours hard at her home receiving no relief from Ned, who at the slightest of excuses, starts whipping Amy. John is a product of miscegenation and the core of his two selves can be traced to this identity of his— he is neither black nor white. Although like Their Eyes Were Watching God, we do not find the trauma of rape present in the novel as it is, its trauma is lived by John (the outcome of a rape) throughout his life. Nowhere in the novel do we see, John is able to give himself fully, either in his three marriages, or his profession as a preacher or even to his bestial self. He does not seem to belong anywhere. This inability to commit oneself to any one thing, person or object in his life is something that can be attributed to slavery. As Nancy Peterson opines,

the severe constraints the system of slavery placed upon black men, we might wonder how, or if, they would preserve any sense of themselves as autonomous individuals, as men, as lovers and husbands, as fathers, and as sons (qtd, in Schereiber 63).

Susan Mayberry also regards that the “lack of ability to choose and be chosen by loved ones remain an important by-product of slavery for the African-American community” (Mayberry 198). Hence, many black characters lack a sense of self, which they do not own, and are unable to give themselves fully to any other person. Also, the society values whiteness and this inhibits a black person to develop a positive sense of self. Unable to attain that sense of wholeness, a black person tries various ways to achieve it and fails to do so. This is very symptomatic of the story that Hurston tries to put across. Devoid of the horrors of actual slavery, the novel is
nevertheless a horrifying depiction of the after-effects of a practice that renders the South the Other for the whole American Nation.

_Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)_

Published in 1937, Hurston’s second fictional work, _Their Eyes Were Watching God_, is frequently described as a novel of female quest for love, a novel championing black culture, as a novel of “black love” (Jordan) and most importantly as Hurston’s masterpiece. However, the present analysis attempts to study the novel through the prism of the Gothic and to depict how the slavery inherent in the Southern land made it inevitable for Hurston to include disruptive elements in her tale. The novel specifically deals with the life of Janie Crawford and her journey through the blighted South where her desire to find an ideal lover is constantly thwarted by the irreparable damage done to the land of the South by the practice of slavery. Unlike _Jonah’s Gourd Vine_, this novel deals with the history of the South in relation to experiences of a black woman and hence evokes greater horror due to the twice-subjugated position of a black woman in white America. Hurston showed the horror within the black communities unashamedly and possibly she thought of such horrific plight of the blacks a result of their displacement from their home i.e., Africa. Situating her story in the rural South, Hurston gave a realistic foundation to the otherwise surreal traits of Gothic literature where, as Goddu suggests, the nightmarish world of early American Gothic writers such as Poe and Hawthorne has become “the Monday morning of the Negro author” (Goddu 133).

Transgression is a major theme in Gothic works as the genre is intimately concerned with flouting the boundaries and in turn making them more visible. For instance _Dracula_, a classic Gothic text, has transgression in the form of the eponymous Dracula who is neither living nor dead, is often present and absent, and makes various characters realize the Other in themselves. As the Gothic castles, dungeons and ghosts of the early Gothic fiction failed to evoke terror among the later readers, there was a shift in the techniques of arousing terror and horror. The trope of transgression had immense capability to evoke in the common man the fear of heeding to the Other within him/herself. Steve Bruhm calls the Gothic “a narrative of prohibitions, transgressions and processes of identity constructions that occur within such tensions”
The susceptibility of ordinary human beings to acts of transgression interrogated the boundaries of civilization, culture and humanity itself. With the recognition of the Other in the Self, the familiar became the source of horror. In fact, this is the reason Peter Garrett calls the Gothic a genre preoccupied with “subverting the established order” (Garrett 2). In the American Gothic fiction also transgression occupies a significant status, as the Gothic in America is rooted in the real. In the rural South transgression takes the sexual form with occurrences such as rapes. The presence of the mulattoes evinces the occurrence of such sexual transgression in the American nation and in turn threatens its identity. Experiences of rape and miscegenation in the South are a traumatic memory for the black women. This is a form of sexual transgression and quite ironically, though it is the white slave masters who rape the black women, it is the white race that is afraid of miscegenation. In "Their Eyes Were Watching God" also we see that Hurston chooses not to dwell on the rapes of Janie’s grandmother and mother.

As a result of her being an offspring of miscegenation, Janie is a mulatto. African-American post-bellum writers often have a mulatto as a protagonist. Leslie Fiedler suggests that often black or coloured women are presented in early American Gothic as fallen women and were meant to be symbols of being oversexed, something that an ideal white woman was not supposed to be. However, as the black Gothic writers choose to have a mulatto as a protagonist, they suggest a merger of both a black and a white woman. They suggest how the black community is corrupted due to the sexual violence of the plantation owners. It is also notable how in early Gothic fiction, the mothers who transgress are almost always shown to be black not white, reinforcing the idea that a black woman is sexually easily available and is “the Gothic dark temptress of the society” (Wester 84). Such fiction denies the black woman the right to speak for herself and as Wester points out, silences and manipulates the body of the black woman making them all the more accessible. This notion stems from various stereotypes formulated in the society by the patriarchal culture to displace their own
sexuality onto a woman. The issue to transgression is also related to that of identity as within the American South a new category of the mulattoes emerged largely due to the sexual assault of the white men. This new category of human beings was spectral in their existence for they hovered on the boundaries of blackness and whiteness, not being accepted wholly by any race. Janie’s identity as a mulatto is also Gothic because of the history of sexual transgression it unveils. She does not think herself as coloured till she sees herself in a school photograph. The mulatto is a threat to the order that is neatly maintained by delineation and maintenance of racial categories. Therefore, it is horrifying to the dominant white race that any human being with even a drop of black blood should ‘pass’ as a white. Also as we see in one of Hurston’s early plays “Color Struck”, some of the blacks felt insecure due to the preferential treatment given to the mulattoes that could create equally horrific behavioural problems. The presence of Janie as a mulatto in the novel is a testimony to the dreadful sexual violence meted out to black women in the South. It evokes the repressed history of the South i.e., the lustful desires of the white let out on the black slave women. Yoriko Ishida rightly says that “the horrendous mulatto becomes appropriate material for the Gothic Other, who gives rise to the fear and anxiety of disrupting eutaxy for whites by transgressing social boundaries and categories” (Ishida 58). In her detailed analysis of Their Eyes Were Watching God as a novel of testimony, Diana Miles investigates how the book is an evidence of the common trauma of violence and atrocities in black community. Through this Hurston, “unmasks the offenders and records the violence inflicted against women into the memories of all who read her works” (Miles 49). Janie establishes not only a new identity for herself but also communicates about her experiences (traumas) to other women. And there is another transmission of this experience to those who read about Janie’s feats, especially female readers. As per Miles, such passing on of experience as legacy is important so that the mistakes are not repeated in the future. For Hurston, trauma was very much a part of growing up as a black girl who was rejected by the family because of her bold and seemingly incorrect behaviour. What we see in Janie in her repeated reference to inside/outside state of selfhood, is the treatment Hurston received in her childhood,
The threat of violence used to maintain Hurston’s marginal status and the abusive reinscribing of her “difference” from the rest of the family had to be traumatic for her (Miles 53).

The novel then can be said to have exorcise not only the national ghosts but also the ghosts that irked Hurston’s mind and her own life. The text consolidates the link between the Gothic and trauma studies by participating in the act of providing a testimony.

What Michelle A. Masse chooses to call ‘marital Gothic’ becomes an integral part of Hurston’s story. She explains how in most of the stories, where marriages occur as the happy ending, the readers and writers try to escape the “Gothic labyrinth” by locating the anxieties “in the fear of the mother, self, older generation, homophobia, gender archetypes etc.”(Masse 680). The closures in such stories suggest a place where all these fears are laughed off as unreal. It is generally believed that after these fears and anxieties are dealt with once, they cannot reappear in the ‘happily – ever – after’ married life. Masse relocates the center of fear in a newer kind of tale where the husband is wearing the mantel of the authoritarian father. Hence,

the figure who was supposed to lay horror to rest has himself become the avatar of horror who strips voice, movement, property, and identity itself from the heroine (Masse 682).

Hurston also, as she tells the story of the American South, weaves within the fabric of her story the strands of marital Gothic. The trauma of this experience lies in the fact that from a dream world, the heroine is huddled back into a real world and made to live this trauma again and again, as the source of trauma never alters. The element that induces horror in a tale of the marital Gothic is not a visit to a far-fetched castle, where a monster captures off as unreal. The denial of a voice and the fetters of exquisite garments limit her mobility and tie her to the tomb-like house. As I see it, the marital Gothic is a form of female Gothic tale only, due to the horrors faced by a woman from the figures of authority. Claustrophobia or the fear of closed spaces is an important feature in a Gothic story, a characteristic much found in the works of Poe, Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Pertinently used by Poe in “The Black Cat” and by Hawthorne in The Fall of the House of Usher, the motif of claustrophobia evokes feelings of confinement. Especially with relation to female Gothic, Snodgrass
observes that this trope suggests no outlet for unfettered friendships, curiosity, adventure or artistic expressions. Claustrophobia or the dread of being limited in one’s movements whether physical or mental is also synonymous with premature burial. As Aguirre opines,

At the heart of the literature of terror lies one ruling symbol. It manifests itself in haunted buildings, in labyrinths and prison, catacombs and caves; in borders and frontiers, thresholds and walls; in the terror of the shuttered room and this protection of the magic circle; in the promise and dread of the closed door; in the journeys of discovery. Fears of transgressions and flights from retribution. The world is defined in horror literature as space and, further more as a closed space (qtd. in Cain 2).

This confinement, Snodgrass suggests, is clearly visible in Paul D’s physical confinement and Sethe’s emotional confinement in Beloved. Claustrophobia and marital Gothic are intertwined in a symbiotic relationship. The vastness and the cluelessness associated with entrapment a very much a part of Janie’s life as Joe Starks’ wife for whom she is a trophy wife. After the image of Jody’s falls from the altar of her heart and mind, this cluelessness and the trappings of the marital tomb engulfs her yet again. Jody’s behavior toward Janie is certainly of suppression as she is buried beneath fine silks and smothering head rags. Hence, the same marriage that promised flight, ambition, liveliness and adventure to Janie, renders her “mute, paralyzed, enclosed” (Masse 687). Janie remains a mannequin, a display of his arrogance, wealth and mayorship. And Masse writes, “[t]he silence, immobility, and enclosure of the heroines mark their internalization of repression as well as the power of the repressing force” (Masse 688). Janie dissatisfaction and unfulfilment in her first marriage leads her to take a chance in Joe Starks who is named ironically to mean barrenness. The first instance of silencing occurs when she’s called to make a speech as Joe is proclaimed the mayor of Eatonville,

Thank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothing ‘bout no speech makin’. Ah never married her fo’ nothin’ lak dat.She’s uh woman and her place is in her home (TEWW 62).

And Janie in response “dons a mask she will wear for years” (Lowe 82). This silencing or loss of voice shows that her marriage has elements of disillusionment.
Amidst Joe’s new conquests, Janie feels, “A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely”(46). Joe here appears as a vampire and a zombie whose sole driving force is materialistic ambitions, invested in him through the white culture. Both Jody and Killicks shut her off from interactions with the community suggesting imprisonment and stifling of sexuality. Miles is of the view that Hurston’s fiction is the testimony of trauma suffered by the blacks and this is evident in the “recurring figures of silence, departure, and acts of physical violence” which are so prominent in her texts. It is precisely the presence of these elements that makes Hurston’s novels a good example of realistic Gothic fiction. Miles holds that Hurston depicts the victimization as something that happens as commonplace phenomenon.

Hurston addresses the personal and cultural trauma that results from living in a perpetually violent world while continually bearing the “dead-weight of social degeneration” and gender discrimination. (Miles 21)

J. L. Mills goes to the extent of saying that a novel can well be said to be a book about the South if there is a dead mule in that book. He finds a dead mule in the works of stalwarts like William Faulkner, Cormen McCarthy and Truman Capote. Hence, what he chooses to call the Equine Gothic is very much present in the Hurston’s novel. Not only the mule is dead but while it lives as an old mule, it serves the function of being the object of Starks’ materialistic ambitions. Joe “appears” to be kind towards the mule just as he is towards Janie, because, “his motivation in pampering both mules is simply to elevate himself in the community, and in both cases, his “kindness” is dead” (Meisenhelder 122). He comes across as one who kills, while making it appear as if he nurtures life. The mule’s death appears unnatural and “we see the double paradox in Starks’ behaviour: the mule dies from his cruel kindness just as Janie is spiritually starved by his poor, poor wealth” (Meisenhelder 122). The image of the dead mule combines with the image of decay in the American South when Starks carries out the dead mule’s funeral. Starks uses this opportunity again as a platform to gain favour from the people of Eatonville. Hurston, Marks opines, quite poignantly associates Starks and his fellowmen to buzzards (vultures). Just as the flock waits for their leaders to start clawing at the dead mule’s carcass, his fellowmen also wait for him to start the mock funeral. Julia A. Haurykiewicz focuses on the silencing of Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God and likens Janie’s silence to the condition of being a
mule. Janie’s condition in the book mirrors the condition of this beast of burden. Halberstam opines how the advocates of slavery developed the stereotypes of “mule, jezebel, breeder woman and buck to let the power inherent in such relationships a covert attribute to “justify economic exploitation [and] stamp out agency” (Halberstam 56-7). Thus such stereotypes exaggerated their beastliness and reduced their humanity. Janie’s mother and grandmother had their black lineage corrupted due to the rapes by white men. A mule is also a mixed breed just like Janie and her mother were mulattoes. Nanny has seen in her life how “the social hierarchy works to pass ‘de load’ from White men to black males to black ‘womenfolk’s” (Haurykiewicz 52).

In her prophetic tone, fearing for Janie, she says that she would not like Janie to become the mule of the world. Thus, Janie’s voice is dominated here. She is again silenced by Killicks, who wishes to get a mule for her, so that she can also plough while “the irony is that she is literally drying up and withering inside in this loveless marriage in which her voice is continually silenced” (Haurykiewicz 54). She is perpetually diminished as a human being and is reduced to an animal who obeys its master. Jody Starks also “bind[s] and gag[s] his wife “ (56) through her head rag.

This imagery of mixed racial heritage further likens the yellow mule to Janie, a woman whose birthright is a legacy of White men raping black women (Haurykiewicz 58).

Silencing of a woman’s voice is due to the threat that is represented by a woman who is not controlled by the patriarchal culture. Such women who are not silenced by the patriarchal culture are labeled as ghosts and monsters. In fact the ideology imposed upon the women to be the ‘angels’ of the house put forth an ideal before the women that required them to be subservient and mute in order to play their roles effectively. In the Victorian age the presence of the ‘New Woman’ who was economically and socially independent gave rise to fears among the upholders of patriarchy regarding her free sexuality. Many Gothic works display this New Woman and the anxieties of the society that accompanied her rise. As Kayla Lindsey write, the “deviant woman becomes the exaggerated monstrous woman who often plays the role of the mirror, parody or double of the angelic feminine figure, the improper versus the proper” (Lindsey 4). Janie, though not labeled as a monstrous woman, is definitely the Other in the Eatonville society after she comes back in her overalls. Till she was silent she was revered as the mayor’s wife but just as she asserts her sexual freedom, she is
considered a threat to the social order of the town. Such conformity aimed at what is attained by the Gothic trope of premature and live burial. Usually in most of the early female Gothic works even if the heroine rebels for some time, at the end what the text implies is, as Kilgour explicates,

> the bourgeois home is a Gothic prison for women, for at the end of the text life returns to a normality that is ratified by its difference from the nightmare counterpart. The Gothic forms of domesticity evaporate, enabling the heroine to return to the real version . . . so that women’s continuing incarceration in the home that is always the man’s castle is assured (qtd. in Rae 7).

Evie Shockley explicates that often nuns in the churches who failed to fulfill their vows, specially those related to their chastity, were given the punishment of being locked away in dungeons for repentance. Thus, the trope of live burial came to be associated with repression of female sexuality. The house becomes the site of horror and as Kate Ferguson Ellis opines is another form of Gothic castle that traps a woman, precisely what happens to Janie in both her marriages. Hurston in her book does not support such notion and portrays Janie without any male sexual partner at the end of the novel, asserting her female independence. This turn in the Gothic narrative is one of the ways in which Hurston contributes to the genre through her progressive ideas.

Coupled with the claustrophobic nature of Janie’s life, we find in the novel a decay with a very much ingrained in the way of living in the South. Decadence – both physical and psychological is characteristic of the American South. Decay was an integral part of the Gothic since its conception as the genre dealt with the decaying feudal order in its European version. In the American context, the virgin lands of America were corrupted by the sins of the plantation owners. An example of this decay can be William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” where the old lady carefully keeps her lover’s decayed corpse. Psychologically, this decadence is present in the mental corruption, greed, and mental disorders of those characters who inhabit the South. As Punter and Byron assert, “The Gothic horror of the Decadence is the horror of dissolution, of the nation, of society and, ultimately, as we move into the Modernist world, of the human subject itself” (43). The land of the South was robbed of it’s beauty, abundance, and civilization because of the evil of slavery and we see this decay in Janie’s first marriage. In fact, slavery provides the American Gothic, as
Goddu asserts, with “tools of terror” (Spooner 65). Every now and then Hurston evokes images of beauty, but beneath this pastoral veneer lays immense decay. As Wester points out, “the Southern pastoral during Jim Crow hides stagnation and ruin” (Wester 109). She also goes to the extent of saying that people in the South during this era are emotionally, culturally, and spiritually dead. Their Eyes Were Watching God seems like a tale where all the oppressive characters are the same and are trying to cast Janie into the same mold. This decay is evident in the life of Logan Killicks that suggests his sexual sterility that becomes more pronounced when compared to Janie’s vitality. Killicks is twice Janie’s age and she notices that “his head is so long one way and so flat on de sides” with “dat pone uh fat back uh his neck”, a belly “too big” and his toe nails like “mule foots”, which he never bothers to wash properly before coming to bed. It is the mud that soils their marital bed, because Janie clearly is the dreamer of blossoms. She finds that “his head is so long one way and so flat on de sides” with “dat pone uh fat back uh his neck”, a belly “too big” and his toe nails like “mule foots”, which he never bothers to wash properly before coming to bed. It is the mud that soils their marital bed, because Janie clearly is the dreamer of blossoms. Killicks, “look like some old skullhead in de graveyard.”(13)

And not surprisingly after that, Janie feels that she is at “a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been”. When Killicks asks her to shovel manure and he repulses Janie as he looks “like a black bear doing some clumsy dance on his hind legs.”(52) He even threatens Janie about her life, displaying the reality of gender relations in the rural South that are still haunted, if not by slavery, then by the ghost of power equations among men and women as he says, “Ah’11 take holt uh dat ax and come in there and kill yun!”(30). In the words of Susan Willis, the brutality of Killicks’ attitude is not in physical threat, rather, “it resides in the stifling of dreams ; the death of spirit ; the denial of art , imagination and creativity” (Willis 124), much in congruence with the “iconography of entrapment” (Goddu 133) which Goddu associates with the American Gothic.

Evoking the homeland of her ancestors, Africa, Hurston uses the magic and occult of her own ethnicity to add to the earlier existing Gothic fiction that had magic as one of the major themes. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s many tales such as “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) and The House of Seven Gables (1851) have elements of witchcraft in them. Usage of voodoo and ancient myths add historicity to Hurston’s text. Voodoo
and Hoodoo are an integral part of the African-American tradition and sensibility. This religion began in the American colonies when slaves were transported from Africa to America.

Voodoo gods and goddesses’ appearance and actions speak to the oneness and experience of their worshipers. One finds that Voodoo alludes to the heroic and the rebellious; reflects mundane jealousies, desires and hierarchies; illustrate the ravages of slavery on a collective consciousness; and provides a means of self-expression for that same collective (Lamothe 160).

Karen McCarthy, an anthropologist, relates voodoo to empowerment among African-American women. Voodoo is adaptable, it is responsive to other culture and religions, it is without any canon or creed or a religious head, it has multiple spirits, the intimate way in which it reflects the lives of those who have faith on it – all these features of voodoo, assists women in working realistically and creatively with the forces which confine them. In Hurston’s works, Holloway points out how the images of voodoo illustrate the experiences at her father’s place and the experiences of African sensibility. Voodoo in her works is not depicted with the tom-tom beats or jungle bunny stereotypes. Rather she explores or manifests “the Southern folk with a Black Atlantic experience rooted in slavery, armed revolution and African spirituality” (Lamothe 164). According to Annette Trefzer, Voodoo is best known metaphorically, not literally. One of the practices of Voodoo is the ritual of ‘possession’. The possession of human slave bodies by spirits or Ioas, frees them enslavement and this renders them beyond the public narratives ruled by the Whites. As Trefzer opines, “The plurality of possession’s, and more generally, voodoo’s, signification – linguistic, religious, historical and cultural – necessitates that it be reinvented every time that it exist predominantly as an ambiguous performance” (Trefzer 302). People who undergo such possessions say many things that they cannot say otherwise. Hence, such possession has “political and revolutionary potentials” (Trefzer 306). They, according to Scott, openly indulge in criticisms, threats and attacks. I. M. Lewis confirms likewise that such possessions are safe outlets for social protest by women or other oppressed groups. All the frustrations and anger gets released without any fear of punishment as its consequence. Diaspora communities carry out such ceremonies to appease the spirit in order to inspire the community. Voodoo rituals inspire a black community to resist the values of the
slave-master. Thus, Voodoo and Hoodoo become an integral part of the African-American Gothic as it helps to subvert the white discourse of otherness. Exactly like Voodoo, Gothic literature by the African-American writers, seeks to go against the figures of authority, while leaving the white man bewildered as to what they are subjected to.

Blacks believed that the magic and the influence of their fetishisms followed them beyond the seas… little figures of wood or of rock, representing men and animal, were for them the authors of supernatural things (Laguerre 145).

Daphne Lamothe traces all the features, which liken Janie to the Voodoo goddess Ezili Freda, such as her light-skin sexuality are her quest for love. However, Lamothe also establishes that this part of Janie gets toned down as she becomes increasingly dominated by qualities of Ezili Danto, Ezili Danto is a black goddess associated with the rage of maternal energy. She is not elitist, and belongs to the working class. Precisely these characteristics are seen in Janie as she is at home with the black workers in the muck and very much in love with the black Tea Cake. However, Danto is also associated with the power of destruction and hence is called the “red-eyed”. The horror in the novel which emerges in the latter part of the novel shows that Danto is largely and violently displeased about the fact that the blacks actually show greater reverence to the supremacy of white culture and race. They are captivated with the forces of materialism. She demands attention of all the blacks when they choose to let go of their independence and experiences. Janie since her early days had a gift of communicating with nature but she chooses to follow the white landowners, much against her instinct and here nature asserts her supremacy over the mankind that is misguided. Here, the American Gothic meets Africa as Danto’s connection with water is witnessed in the catastrophe of the great flood. This violent rage leads to the “[t]he hurricane… described as a terrifying and cosmic force that extracts the blood sacrifices that “real gods” demand” (Lamothe 169). Danto shows the black folk that their fate is not safe in the passive faith of Christianity or in whiteness. Black writers time and again choose to reverse the otherness that the white writers depicted in their work. Hence, Hurston shows through the spectacle of destruction that what a dependence on the white gods engenders. Here the Christian doctrine of submissiveness is called into question. Judie Newman is of the opinion that Tea Cake’s death as he is consumed by rabies is an image of consumption of
human being by an animal much like a totemic possession. Also, his jealousy also turns him into a minor Joe Starks who is the worshipper and devotee of consumerism. More specifically, rabies associates Tea Cake’s biting of Janie’s arm while dying with the Kwakiutl cannibal dance in which the neophytes bite a piece of flesh from the enemy’s arm, like a totemic animal. The totemic animal hierarchy, Newman asserts, is seen as we see the snarling dog standing on the cow’s back, above the floodwater filled with fish snakes and people.

Morbidity and death are closely related with the Gothic as a generic characteristic. Above all fears of life, it is the fear of death that is the central motivating force of many Gothic works. Andrew Smith opines that in his analysis of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Terry Castle observes that Freud’s uncanny is witnessed in the fear that the living may be dead. Hurston deploys the myth of Isis and Osiris in the novel, which consists of the values of death and individual helplessness in face of nature’s power. The use of such a myth is much in synchronization with the Gothic genre. Iris is called the “sorrowing wife and Protector of the Dead” (Obson). When Janie is introduced on the third paragraph of the novel, the narrative reads:

so the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead...She had come back from the sodden and the bloated, the sudden dead; their eyes flung wide open in judgment (TEWWG 9).

As Barr suggests, she is associated with a plural dead, with death by violence, the image of the drowned and the murdered, the “sudden dead”. For Barr, in these terms we can read a substantial link between Isis and Janie, much in the way that psychoanalysis reads the texts of dreams. The hurricane may be associated with Seth, the murderer of Osiris, as thunder was said to be the voice of Seth. Also, the massive built dog that attacks and bites Tea-Cake is sitting on the back of a cow, and similar images of dog are to be found in the myth as well. Janie refers to the “pure hate” in the dog’s eye, and to the “mad dog” (247, 263). Another peculiar parallel, which Barr finds, is that as a god of the dead, in Upper Egypt, Osiris was identified with Khenti Amenti, the wolf-god in a peculiar fashion. And toward his death, Tea Cake is also personified as a dog or wolf when he suffers in the last stages of rabies. Janie states that “Tea Cake was gone, something else was looking out of his pace.” (269). When she decides to go for a doctor, Tea Cake “almost snarl(s), looks at her with “blank
ferocity”, and she later sees him with “coming from the outhouse with a queen loping gait, swinging his head from side to side” (269-71). Finally, she sees him as a “friend”, and he bites her, “he closed his teeth in the flesh of her forearm” (273). Tea Cake is killed through the dog seen as Anubis, or as Khenti Amenti, fostered in its appearance by the storm itself, but it is Janie who is forced to squeeze the trigger. At this point she also acts the role of Seth, the agent of his death. It is important to note here, as Barr asserts, she has also been a contributing agent of her second’s husband’s death, and in this she has been given god-like power.

We see a self-hatred in Starks and Mrs. Turner, who seems like a forerunner of Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye*. Both Starks and Mrs. Turner worship the values of the whites and this in turn has lead them to hate themselves and adopt all ways which likens them to whites. Such blacks have a “contradictory longing to possess the reality of the Other, even though that reality is one that wounds and negates” (qtd. in Schreiber 18). Fanon claims that the black man makes constant efforts to become white and renounce his race and to follow in the footsteps of the white. A victim of the white supremacist ideology, the black thinks that the only way he can gain some respect in the eyes of the white is to become like him. Hence, due to the trauma of the white supremacist ideology, a “normal black child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (qtd. in Schreiber 143). Also, as Hurston uses the white forces as outside agencies, she could be regarded as a participant in subverting that body of Gothic fiction, which regards the black, the Indian or any person of colour as outsider and consequently, a bearer of uncivilized, raw energies, which would corrupt the civilized white world. Hurston belongs to the category of the slave writers in the sense that they also portrayed the shattering of the Edenic promise due to slavery and show that “beneath the Edenic surface lay moral ruin” (Bodziock 262). Hurston, here, can be seen as endorsing black values as ones which are life affirming and propitious. In her works, we witness the use of, “the Gothic to haunt back, re-working the Gothic’s conventions to intervene in discourse that would demonize them” (Goddu 125). A mulatto like Janie, Mrs. Turner is a woman who thinks that someone as light-skinned as Janie should not be with Tea Cake. Hurston in ironical lines, reveals Mrs. Turner’s worship of whites as she had,
built an altar to the unattainable-Caucasian characteristics for all...[so that]
somehow she and others through worship could attain her paradise- a heaven
of straight-haired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs (TEWWG 144).

She conspires a meeting between Janie and her own brother. She is the one who sets
out to defile the house of Janie, with her hatred for black culture and the ways she
wants to escape it. No doubt, Meisenhelder chooses to call her “the serpent in the
Eden” (Meisenhelder 125). Though she does not elicit any response from Janie, she
arouses hatred and jealousy in Tea Cake’s heart, and he beats her “to show he was the
boss”(147). Maria J. Racine indicates that Tea Cake’s act of violence towards Janie
demonstrates his own “inability to articulate-or lack of a voice”(qtd. in Simmons
178). The violence rendered by Tea Cake, forebodes what is about to occur next in
the Edenic Muck. Wester illustrates how creating a spectacle was an integral part of
slavery. Janie’s beating by Tea Cake in front of the whole Everglades community can
also be seen as act which provided a spectacle to the whole community to watch
implying voyeurism.

Erik D. Curren chooses to study exclusively the last part of the novel as highly
terrifying. The Gothic effect, which this part generates, is more due to the fact that it
is immediately in stark contrast to Janie’s fulfilling love life. In this section of the
book, Hurston shows that

even the folk community of the Everglades is not in fact immune to prejudice
and snobbery. This is the point where the book changes from optimistic quest
to Gothic horror thriller and the admirable egalitarianism of the folk
community shows its ideological cracks –racism, materialism, and a magical
belief in the power and goodness of those in authority- that threatens to
undermine it completely (Curren 2-3).

A large part of the community at the Muck refuses to believe the signs that precede
the hurricane and ideologically refuse to believe in their African-American heritage.

Beans running fine and prices good, so the Indians could be, must be, wrong.
You couldn’t have a hurricane when you’re making seven and eight dollars a
day picking beans. Indians are dumb anyhow, always were (TEWWG 155).
For Curren, Tea Cake, “is skeptical of tribal knowledge, is wedded to Mammon, and credences the authority of whites” (Curren 3). He depends on the white authorities for the decision to flee the Everglades or not, saying that, “The bossman might have the thing stopped before morning anyway” (158). As Curren indicates, the community now thinks more about money, they deny their heritage, they invest whites with divine powers, “They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God” (160). He further clarifies that Hurston wanted them to realize that they had been looking at God for too long, when they should have rather left with Indians and animals. Curren observes that the strange and familiar, the uncanny dependence on the white God/Old Massa corrupts Janie’s Eden once again. As opposed to the commonly believed African practices thought as dark magic (such as voodoo, loas, zombies et cetera.), it is the white enlightenment religion that disrupts the pastoral scene – the same views as represented by Nanny, Mrs. Turner and Joe Starks. Tea Cake, when he finally moves out of the storm-struck place, carries his insurance papers and leaves his guitar. Sigrid King focuses on the power of naming and notes that as they recover from the hurricane, the whites on the Palm Beach catch Tea Cake and Janie. White men call him ‘Jim’ and this groups him with all other black men. Denied his own identity, Tea Cake sees how colour continues to be important even after a person is dead. The white men, are buried in a box which are covered in a mass grave and ironically as Tea Cake looks at the black and white bodies in appalling shape, he comments that he “can’t tell whether dey’s white or black” (171). He tells Janie that, “De ones de white man knows is nice colored folks. De ones he don’t know is bad niggers” (172).

Sundahl observes about Hurston that, “She has a way of allowing catastrophe to descend upon her characters at precisely the moment when they have achieved some insight into the fundamental nature of their lives. She introduces disruptive forces into essentially harmonious situations” (Sundahl 31). During the last part of the novel, just as Janie seems to have found her ideal lover and an ideal life, nature intervenes. Meisenhelder throws light on how Tea Cake’s death is not only to evoke a tragic mood, but Hurston also wants to show how the false values, which Tea Cake had come to represent, needed to be removed from the book. Hence, he is symbolically killed by his fallacious values. Janie herself gives testimony in the court, “He had to die to get rid of the dog” (187). Through chilling description of Tea Cake’s
hydrophobia and rabies, Tea Cake tries to control Janie and his movements again and again, hint at the spiritual danger that is building for Janie, who is able to escape from Tea Cake’s shots but has to kill him to save herself. Degeneration from a human being into an animal-like entity Tea Cake turns into a bloodthirsty monster at the end of the story. He becomes more of a threat to Janie, than Killicks and Starks ever did. As Darryl Hattenhauer aptly suggests,

while some critics have read this text as a tribute to romantic love, it appears to be more of a modern turn on the vampire narrative (Hattenhauer).

To add to the horror of the whole narrative, Hattenhauer suggests that Janie might have contracted rabies from Tea Cake’s bite and in all probability she might die very soon. This is foreshadowed many times in the novel. The first indication is Tea Cake’s death referred to in the beginning. Second, Pheoby’s reference to the story of Anne Tyler, a middle-aged widow who eloped with her lover and he stole away everything she had, "She had waited all her life for something, and it killed her when it found her" (179). Next, while Tea Cake and Janie are trapped in the hurricane, she openly admits her love and happiness to be with him, saying that since she has seen the morning light, she would not hesitate to die at the dusk. To add to this idea, the doctor says that if Tea Cake bites her she would be in the “fix” and he testifies in the court that Janie was indeed bitten by the rabid dog. Also, after having told her story to Pheoby she imagines her reunion with Tea Cake, "He would be thinking up new songs to play her when she got there" (281). As Hattenhauer suggests, vampire bats often carry rabies, and whoever carries rabies displays behavior of a vampire. Caplan suggest that the alertness, the loss of natural timidity, the aggressive behavior, all makes one carrier of the rabies virus very potent transmitter of it. Thus, by the transmission of the rabies virus, Janie is possibly going to die very soon and the most significant indication of Janie’s impending death is way she gives to Pheoby her tongue “in yo’ mouf’” recalling the last lines of Shakespeare’s Hamlet,

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story (Act V, Scene ii)

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Janie’s character portrayal as a heroine on quest can be seen as a corollary to the elements of female Gothicism present in the book. Kari J. Winter observes how all the self-assertive female protagonists are killed in the classic Gothic work *The Monk*. Janie is not annihilated at the end of the story and herein lies Hurston’s advocacy of the other side of female Gothicism. In the opening scene of the novel where the members of her community gaze at her, as David Ikard opines, we see that “[d]espite the obvious social and economic advantages that Janie wields over her working-class detractors, she emerges in this scenario as the true victim of oppression and her accusers as a bloodthirsty lynch mob” (Ikard). By contrast at the end, Janie emerges as a figure who kills her potential murderer rather than being killed by him in the name of love. Janie’s assertion of her sexuality every now and then presents a newer dimension by a black female writer of the early twentieth century. This questing protagonist is especially vital in understanding that such female figures were not common in literature, much lesser in black literature. Though a lot of critics oppose this viewpoint, it cannot be denied that Hurston does present a heroine who at least strives to be (if not is) a woman of quest and hence, adds to the presence of female Gothicism in the text. For Mary Helen Washington, Janie acquires a heroic status, not by externals but by her own struggle for self-definition, for autonomy, for liberation from the illusions that others have tried to make her live or that she has submitted to herself (Washington 16).

She examines how Janie’s life is a parallel to the conquests of a classic mythological hero which adds to the assertion of her sexuality that refuses to be tied down. She starts by exploring her newfound sexuality but when Nanny and Logan try to put a bar on her freedom, she leaves off with Joe to make her way in a world of adventure. As Jody tries to smother her spiritual life and her desire, she again tries to break-free and leaves off for a totally unfamiliar world of adventures with Tea Cake on the Muck. Next, her journey to Everglades, Tea Cake’s killing and the trial can be seen as an underworld, where she has passed the greatest ordeal. Finally, is the hero’s return to his kingdom and this can be seen in Janie’s coming back to Eatonville. It might appear as though Janie oscillates between being a hero and a heroine. One of the poignant moments occurs in Janie’s action as a female hero, when she uses signifying against Jody Starks. As Cynthia Bond examines the phenomenon of signifying in black culture, she equates signifying with power. We see this power in Janie when,
"she kills Joe rhetorically" (Bond 49). Hence, she is able to cross her boundary as a married black woman and what she is able to do "represents a castration, the figurative correlative of male power" (Bond 49). Janie always manifests the spirit of a risk-taker, rather than someone who lives by guidelines formulated by male and white dominated ideology. Another important hero-like act performed by Janie is the killing of Tea Cake for self-defense. Susan Willis calls this "the book’s strongest statement" (Willis 127). This was an attempt towards asserting that even if a husband is truly supportive, in wake of a male dominated culture, women cannot hope for selfhood. This is a radical change at the start of the twentieth century, when, as Rachel Du Plessis opines, women writers had the task of giving a "different set of choices" to character so that marriage /heterosexual love accomplished is not the only possible ending. And the killing of Tea Cake is definitely a move towards achieving that different ending. As Meisenhelder regards, Janie wants to purge from her life all the “racial, spiritual, and sexual threat that Tea Cake has come to represent” (Meisenhelder 141). And even if critics such as Washington find her heroine problematic, they agree that Hurston “puts Janie on the track of autonomy and independence” (Washington 18), something that asserts her as an active protagonist of a female Gothic narrative. And she does take various chances in her life and chooses to flout safety every time she finds a chance of happiness. She also resists the values of society. When she comes back to Eatonville as, all-powerful with her newfound experience and knowledge of female liberty,

The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing. Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking (TEWWG 193).

Janie is the predecessor of all the empowered female characters in the fiction of Afro-American women writers. Hurston problematizes the idea of an absolute solution towards the end of the book i.e., like any Gothic tale the ending is problematic and complicated – Janie’s self and the community - neither can exist at each other’s cost.
Ryan Simmons choose to call this “feminist dialogics” (Simmons 180). Simmons quotes Dale M. Bauer, that dialogic feminism,

warns against a critical short-sightedness women have in patriarchal culture: the myth of a unified subject under patriarchy. And . . . it also cautions against the perils of insertion into a community which might drown out one’s voice the moment one agrees to enter into it (qtd. in Simmons 180).

Hurston’s voice in her first two books tries to bring to light various fears and anxieties that mar the human existence in the South of the American nation. Hurston’s focal point in both the works largely remains the domestic world through which she explicates problems which plague the whole nation. In the later two novels this focus of Hurston’s changes from the home to the nation at large and voices her political inclinations clearly through the employment of the Gothic.

NOTES

1. From the poem “Strange Fruit” by Abel Meeropol where “strange fruit” metaphorically connotes black dead men and women killed by the whites and hanged to the trees. The poem conveys the horror of lynching of the black people.