Chapter III
“Darkness And Decay And Red Death”: Later Novels
The last two works of Zora Neale Hurston, though not belonging to another phase of writing altogether, can be read in a larger perspective. Critics like Richard Wright often wrote negatively about Hurston’s lack of political commitments and lack of political ideology in her works. A study of her later novels not only corroborates otherwise, but also reflects Hurston’s deeply political engagements with the pivotal issues of her age. This becomes possible with the use of Gothic mode in her works. During the 1930s the world was undergoing critical political challenges. Situated in the twenty-first century, a retrospection is just enough to realize that the 1930s was a time when mankind was about to be threatened by another world war, ending in a catastrophic atomic bombing. Thus, an examination of the issues concerned with power - its use and its abuse - become most important to any writer of the times. Hurston was no different in her creative endeavours to uncloak the issues that imperiled and jeopardized the rights of those who were at the receiving end. Her portrayal of Gothicism in these novels brings out her political inclinations about contemporary American nation. This concern for a female black writer, quite understandably included the blacks and the women. Also, it was through the use of the Gothic that she could exhibit the treatment meted out to the subjugated, especially in the American South.

*Moses, Man Of The Mountain (1939)*
Moving away from the domestic sphere of existence in her earlier works, in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), Hurston changes the direction of her concerns from the enslaved home to the threatened and the problematized nation. Hurston often employed Biblical narratives to articulate newer notions and concerns. In one of her early plays, *The First One* (1926), she used the story of Noah cursing his son Ham with blackness to mock at the assertions made by the proslavery adherents. The germ of the novel *Moses*, was sown in the form of a short story written by Hurston called, “The Fire and the Cloud” in which Moses engages in a dialogue with a lizard on the Mount Sinai. Dealing with the Biblical story of Moses, Hurston infuses the story with political anxieties of the age, particularly concerning the rise of totalitarian ideologies and autocratic states. For this she uses the mode of the Gothic. The process of nation
building is rampant with hidden recesses that are either not recorded in the history, or are largely overlooked. Hurston picked the Biblical story of Moses, also to cast light on the struggle of African-Americans as the relation of blacks with the figure of Moses is quite a prominent one. The slavish nature of their existence always had a silver-lining – that some day a leader like Moses would deliver them, guide them and liberate them from this bondage. Various spirituals (such as “Go down, Moses” and “Oh Mary! Don’t You Weep”) center on the figure of Moses to suggest his inextricable connection to the African-American endeavor for liberation. The Exodus has not only been seen only in terms of freedom of the whole African-American people, but even if one slave escaped from the bondage, he compared his liberation to that of the Hebrews. Apap retells the story of a slave William Grimes who escaped from his enslaved existence and used the support of the Bible to justify the failing of his Christian duty to serve his master. Also, the blacks who migrated to the North and Midwest during the Great Migration were often called the Exodusters.

According to Fiedler the Gothic was a pathologized form in America as it lent voice to various traumatized counter narratives. The Gothic helps verbalize all those layers of narratives that are hidden under the veneer of the great American Nation. The tucked away and the concealed anxieties, fears, fragmentation and degeneration, which lie in the underbelly of the discourses about the building of the American nation are articulated openly in the Gothic discourses. As David Jacobson opines, biblical stories need to be retold so as to assess the mistakes in exercise of power and the flaws present in the modern times. Not only during the times when Hurston wrote the novel, but also in the postmodern age, the violence associated with nation building does not cease to exist. Manslaughter in the process of building or reconstructing a nation has long been the case ever since nation building has existed. Certain noticeable cases of genocide as catalogued by Mark Levene has been, the British onslaught on the native peoples of Australasia, the American expulsions, subjugations, and massacres of their remaining unsubdued Indian nations, closely replicated in Latin American countries, notably Argentina, not to say in the Russian anti-Circassian drive to consolidate the Caucasus firmly within the Czarist empire (310).
The idea of nation-building and violence is central to the United States, as establishing a nation of their own, the Americans had to efface those who populated the land i.e., the Red Indians. However, the accounts of this wiping out of the Native Americans rarely find a mention. Many authors have hidden or disguised this information about the brutality involved in the nation-building process. Jerald Kennedy draws attention towards the fact that how in the works of numerous writers about violent struggle with the Native American, many facts were concealed, “according to the dictates of conscience, conviction, and commercial pragmatism” (Kennedy 5). However, a discourse that runs counter to these is also witnessed in the works of writers such as the African-American slave narratives. Kennedy mentions writers such as David Walker, William Apess and Frederick Douglass who sought to unveil the horrors meted out towards the native population of America and the slaves. Walker, as Apap observes, used the story of Exodus to support the notion that African Americans (enslaved and free) are “the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began” (qtd. in Apap 319). This exposition enabled him to deflate the notion that the American state nourished and maintained, “the vision of itself as a chosen nation” (Apap 319). Through such narratives the subversive writers sought to show the yawning chasm between the promises of the American nation and the infidelity of the ‘American’ people to these principles. Kennedy points towards Poe’s “The Man That Was Used Up: A Tale of the Late Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign”, a satire in which he critiqued the idea of a cosmeticizing history. Such cosmeticizing acquires Gothic dimensions because it makes a familiar object appear unfamiliar to inspire queerness and uncanniness. Most notably in the character of General John A. B. C. Smith and the artificiality of his wig, teeth and eyes and limbs – all unnatural, he “metaphorize[d] the invented, prosthetic nature of the national narrative in its concealment of inglorious acts and unjust cruelties” (Kennedy 9). Such a body was not only artificial but also uncanny in its familiarity and strangeness. It was formation of such cosmeticized history that the black writes protest against through the Gothic.

Despotism and the Gothic have been linked with each other since the early days of Gothic novel. 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 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 for anything. 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). Thompson analyses the novel from the political angle and sees it in terms of presentation of a fascist state. The abuse of authority was also a focal issue with regard to the afflicted American South, where law was used to inflict more and more terror in the daily lives of the black. Laws of enslavement and segregation to the extent of monstrosity were a common feature of the American South. McDowell shows how fascist and Nazi forces are present in the book in the very beginning and regards that the book is “against the Nazi blood myths and for those Jews who lost their lives to this mythology” (McDowell 18). The metaphor of Hitler was used by Hurston to suggest “slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, antifeminism, Jim Crow, and the general repression on which Hurston had declared war” (McDowell 25). In the context of nations such as Uganda (Idi Amin), Egypt (Hosni Mubarak), Iraq (Saddam Husain) and North Korea (Kim Jong II), nation-building has also been associated with the execution of dictatorial powers. Especially with regard to the military and political intervention of the United States in territories like Afghanistan and Iraq, the notion of political tyranny associated with nation building is a very contemporary issue. Due to its alignment with the political concerns of the age Moses can well be regarded same as William Godwin’s Caleb Williams (1794). Dani Cavallaro calls Caleb’s master Falkland an “archetypical Gothic despot” (50), as he helps in the consolidation of a malicious and unjust legal system. Caleb, also like Moses, deals with the abuses of authority. The legal system heralded by such a man is a source of intense dismay for Caleb that he wishes never to be at the mercy of such an autocrat,

I held my life in jeopardy because one man was unprincipled enough to assert what he knew to be false! ...Strange that men from age to age should consent to hold their lives, at the breath of another, merely that each inturn may have a
power of acting the tyrant according to the law! ...Turn me a prey to the wild beasts of the desert, so I be never again the victim of man, dressed in gore-dripping robes of authority! (qtd. in Cavallaro 218-19)

The similarity in the two works makes *Moses* also an example of the ‘political Gothic’, as it seeks to present the anxieties, character motivation, and settings much in congruence with the political context of the 1930-40s. This fascist regime is first seen in the Pharaoh’s reign of terror. The very opening of the novel establishes the text as one that deals with the political anxieties of the times. The Pharaoh of Egypt dictates that no male babies are to be born to the Hebrews and if any do take birth, they should be killed. This exercise is undertaken to ensure that Hebrew do not multiply in Egypt.

The Hebrew womb had fallen under the heel of Pharaoh...Men learned to beat upon their breasts with clenched fists and breathe out their their agony without sound. A great force of suffering accumulated between the basement of heaven and the roof of hell. Hebrew women shuddered with terror at the indifference of their wombs to the Egyptian law...they found out that they were aliens...Israel had learned to weep. (*Moses* 1-2)

Thus, the ruler of Egypt, the Pharaoh, can well be seen as representative figure for despotic ambitions. Hurston wrote the novel in 1939 when the world was seething with the threat of Nazism and Fascism. Thompson sees the rule of Pharaoh and his rise to power leading to “the demonization of the cultural Other as an inherently corrupt race” (Thompson 401). The injunction of the Pharaoh of not having any male babies puts the Pharaoh, asserts Thompson, in the category of serial rapist and killer. In fact, Wright asserts that, “In the opening chapter of Moses, the vocabulary of the terror to which the Hebrews are subjected immediately evokes the experiences of African-American slaves”(Wright 59).

The Gothic is intimately related with power and how it is strategically exercised by the state, frequently to crush the masses. The horrifying laws of the Egyptian state under the Pharaoh suggest that he has the capacity to plunder the wombs of the Hebrew women. Thus, he becomes a mass-murderer of children and a ravager of the female body. In *Homo Sacer*, throwing light on the issue of power and its concentration in one person’s hand, Giorgio Agamben cites Foucault’s notion about how people become the victims of the political strategies in the modern state. The
natural life of the people, Foucault holds, becomes a subject of politics, such that politics is turned into “biopolitics” (Agamben 10). Such biopolitics so enables the rulers of the state that they can not only protect life but also annihilate the subjects in their state. Agamben points out how

Foucault argues that the modern Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization to an unprecedented degree, and he speaks of a real “political ‘double bind,’ constituted by individualization and the simultaneous totalization of structures of modern power” (qtd. in Agamben 11).

This bond between human life and the power of the state, Agamben opines, is a common connection between the modern and the archaic state. Thus, it is precisely this connection that Hurston seeks to forge in her story about the Exodus and the tyranny found in it. The totalitarian nature of the state is ancient as well as modern. This autocratic nature of a state’s power that Hurston seeks to convey in Moses, is a part of nation-building and the text becomes an agent to convey this totalitarian nature of the modern state.

Anolik asserts that a significant concern of the Gothic is its preoccupation with the Other and the way in which the fear associated with the Other is articulated. Wright also focuses on a pertinent issue in the book – eugenics, through which the anxiety of the American nation towards the Other comes to the fore. This anxiety about the Other in the nation leads to a tendency in the state towards annihilating the Other. Shawn Kelly explains how this fear, called heterophobia, is levied on to the racial Other, the ethnic Other or national Other. Eugenics is primarily an attempt to escape from this association and intercourse with the Other. It can also be said that eugenics and its practices was a modern form of the anxiety associated with miscegenation in the antebellum era. Wright explicates that the advocates of racism used Bible to consolidate their claims for racial discrimination of the Other. They hinted at a particular episode in Genesis Nine where Noah’s son was cursed and it was identified that his progeny populated the African region. Mojab and Gorman opine that, “[w]ar, massacre, genocide, and ethnic cleansing are some of the forms of violence used by pre-modern and modern states throughout the world” (60). The book was published at a time when eugenics assumed great importance. McDowell draws attention towards
the fact that this was the time when Hitler attacked Poland and sought to change the
course of the world war. The theory of eugenics was promoted to advocate the notion
that certain races should occupy a segregated realm of existence and activity. In the
United States, McDowell explains how the Americans launched campaigns against
the outsiders and Europeans who sought to immigrate to America. In fact, Nancy
Ordover asserts that many women who were not American, such as Latin Americans,
African-Americans and Native American were “being singled out for coerced,
eugenically informed sterilization procedures”(Ordover xiii). Under the guise of
doing appendectomy and hysterectomy, the patients were deceived into sterilization.
Eugenics and its practice in the extremist fashion supports what Balibar calls the
racism of extermination and the racism of oppression. Both seek to support racism
through exclusion and inclusion in a particular community. Eugenists, as Ordover
contends, regarded almost all modern problems of a nation such as poverty, class
struggle, environmental problems as a consequence of racial differences. This panic
and urgency of the practitioners of Eugenics was so vehement that,

Citing the alleged immorality, innate propensities to crime and vice, smaller
crania, illiteracy, compromised heredity, and diminished mental capacity of
non-Nordic peoples, anti-immigrant agitators promised national calamity if
Congress did not act fast. Immigrants, racialized and demonized, were posited
as a threat to what Harvard professor Robert DeCourcey Ward called the
“American race” (Ordover xvii).

McDowell cites Albert Wiggam’s *The Fruit of the Family Tree* (1924), in which
Wiggam vehemently opposed the mixing of races. For him, the practice of Eugenics
was inevitable this was essential to “the production of a great race…the sum and
meaning of all politics, the one living purpose of the state” (qtd. in McDowell 18).

Such fanatic adherence to eugenics is actually the consequence of the fear of the
Other. Wright here, hints towards the presence of cultural imperialism where what is
denounced is not Hebrew origin but Hebrew identity. Hence, the rulers wish to get rid
of the cultural Other- in this case, those who possess the Hebrew identity. We see this
not only in the Pharaoh but also in the heir to the throne Ta-Phar who denies the
humanity of the Hebrews, regarding them as aliens. This extreme racism is also seen
in Moses’ Ethiopian treaty-wife. As she hears the rumours that Moses is a Hebrew,
she lashes out at him saying, “It’s rape for you to even look at me” (Moses 64). This segregation is perpetuated even after the Hebrews are freed. Aaron and Miriam have a condescending attitude towards Zipporah, Moses’ second wife, due to her dark colour. Wright cites Davis, who suggests that Miriam’s words “against Moses’ wife represent the racism that they direct at African-Americans” (qtd. in Wright 62). McDowell draws attention towards the fact that the surveillance of publications by black was increased during World War II. She cites Patrick Washburn who in his book A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government’s Investigation of the Black Press During World War II, wrote that

no less than seven government agencies – the Justice Department, the FBI, the Post Office, the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of War Information, the Office of Censorship, and the War Production Board – exerted various forms of pressure on the black press to curb its outspoken attacks on the government (McDowell 21).

The text can also be seen as a portrayal of anti-Semitism. Toni Morrison sheds light on how the mulattoes, the Native Americans, Chinese and Indians constitute the Other for America that threatens the discourse of American Dream. Jews in the Biblical narrative were also a part of this category of the Other. Hence, anti-Semitism breeds terror in its exercise of hatred and violence towards the Jews. Quite appropriately, Wright asserts that, “Hurston’s understanding of the racial division as idealized abstraction enables her to critique both American racism and the Nazi program” (Wright 69). The early part of the novel displays in great lengths the horrors of the Pharaoh’s regime, much similar to the atrocities on the Jews by Hitler. Witnessed in the Pharaoh’s diktat of Hebrews not giving birth to any male babies, this was, Wright asserts, much similar to a harsh order by the Nazis in 1935. In accordance with this law, only those people were deemed as Germans who were certified by the Nazi party while the Jews were relegated to the status of “guests” or “subjects”. No sexual alliances were to be formed between the Germans and the “guests” for the protection of the honour of the German people. This mirrors the plight of the Hebrews as alien in Egypt, as they are “denied participation in the symbolic and spiritual life of the state by means of a ban prohibiting them from entering temples (Wright 68). Hence, not only about the Other in the American nation, but in the context of world politics as well, the text seeks to draw attention towards
the elimination of the cultural Other. The prevalence of anti-Semitism acquires Gothic significance because as Halberstam asserts, the modern form of anti-semitism unites and therefore produces the threats of capital and revolution, criminality and impotence, sexual power and gender ambiguity, money and mind within an identifiable form, the body of the Jew (Halberstam 95).

Thompson repeatedly calls the disease that Hebrews are for the Egyptian state as cancer. To get rid of cancer, whatever extreme practices they adopt are never quite enough. Not only with the rule of the Pharaoh, but even before, Egypt was a diseased state. Degenerated, decayed and diseased body of the state hints towards another major concern of the Gothic. Thompson throws light on Girard’s idea about how the disease of the nation also reiterates that previously there existed a time when the nation was flourishing and healthy. The elimination of the Hebrews as the Other is the way in which the Pharaoh seeks to restore the glory of the Egyptian nation,

The termination, or sacrifice, of the cultural Other will accomplish this regeneration of the previously degenerate nation, because the perceived cause and symptom of the illness will have been removed (Thompson 402).

The Pharaoh asserts his authority through his rod ceiling the mother’s womb and the base of his power is the impractical law of no male babies being born, or rather, even conceived. The Pharaoh assumes a God-like authority, opines Thompson, and decides that his nation must get rid of the disease called the Hebrews. He creates the feelings of nationalism but also directs all his energies towards the abject of the nation – the Hebrews, by formulating all sorts of laws to ensure that they do not assume a threat to the new nation. Thompson also draws attention towards the fact that their separate gods also heighten the distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. Thus, drawing boundaries between people, the despotic state of Egypt is consolidated. As McDowell asserts,

Hurston’s Moses …can be read as an intervention in the discourses about race raging throughout the 1920s and 1930s, discourses used to justify not only socioeconomic stratification of black in the United States but also the utter extinction of Jews under Nazi Germany. (17)
To crush this regime built on the foundation of terror, Moses displays what Thompson chooses to call “black cultural nationalism”. Hurston also advocates the idea of a race, but this idea of hers is not based on biology but on culture. The demarcation of the ‘Other’ still holds true when Moses chooses to redeem the Egyptian nation. However, this Other is the cultural Other, not the racial Other. Thompson analyses Moses’ strategy of bringing the Pharaoh to his knees and for this he chooses the path of more violence and slaughter to counter Pharaoh’s extreme measure. He uses the power of hoodoo to turn the river into a river of blood, unleashes a plague of frogs, lice, flies and darkness, kills cattle, makes all animals diseased with murrain, makes hailstones fall in Egypt and strikes the whole land of Egypt with Locusts. He slaughters all the Egyptian children.

Then, a great cry arose in Egypt. They cried and died in Egypt. It was the great cry that had issued first from the throat of Israel years before and spread to the rim bones of the world and come back again. And now it poured through the mouth of the Egyptian nation. Pharaoh looked upon his first born and wept. His son was dead and the son of his son was dead in his own blood (Moses 178).

Thus, he unleashes a sight of hellish terror in Egypt for all the non-Hebrews. Thompson argues how,

Moses conflates politics with aesthetics, aesthetics with violence. Through extreme violence, “Goshen” becomes Israel; Moses surpasses the ultranationalist violence of the oppressor with one based on a de-racialized religious faith combined with a racialized cultural determinism, as opposed to biological mysticism. (408)

The fact that violence is a perpetual force in the novel cannot be denied. First it is used to enslave and then it is used to free those slaves. Fascism is, as Thompson also suggests, central to not only the Pharaoh’s reign but also to Moses’ freedom plans. Hurston writes this in her introduction to the book that the power of Moses was not in spiritualism or mysticism. It rather rested in “his rod of power, the terror he showed before all Israel and to Pharaoh, and THAT MIGHTY HAND” (xv). The rod of Moses and his hand are able unleash such horror in Egypt that the Pharaoh relents and frees the Hebrews.
Moses’ power is also absolute and autocratic in case of the Hebrews. Moses is also a Gothic tyrant plagued by slave mentality, as the Hebrews are unable to come to terms with their newfound freedom, they grumble and rebel against Moses. To counter their mutiny, Moses time and again resorts to violence. Miriam and Aaron, who raise their voice against him, are murdered. The rest of the Hebrews are lost in the desert for forty years so that the cultural Other are neatly eliminated. Thus as Thompson regards, “racial and cultural exclusivity; a valorization of warfare... a credo of violence for its own sake...; and a rigorous foreign policy of aggression and isolationism” (Thompson 411), are the values that define any kind of rule that prevails in the text and are the qualities which flourishes in a fascist state. Michael Lackey also throws light on Moses’ dictatorial method to show that Hurston also saw Moses, as a totalitarian ruler. He cites a letter written by Hurston to Carl Ven Vechten, in which Zora regarded Moses as a despot whose authority totally survived on terror and horror created in the minds of the people. She held Moses “responsible for the actual death of at least a half million of the people in his efforts to force his laws upon them” (Kaplan 529). Britt suggests how Moses’ various positive attributes such as his handsomeness, his intellectual capacity as a scholar, and his idealism as hero are all subverted by Hurston through the employment of two elements – “magic and African-American political realism”(Britt 32). Hurston is able to subvert the qualities associated with Moses through the graphic violence that Moses employs time and again to get rid of his opponents. Louis Untermeyer talks about a doubling in the character of Moses that helped Hurston subvert the image of Moses. There is a strange duality in his actions that pulls him down from the pedestal of the emancipator. Moses himself feels that he is indeed divided into two and in turn also highlights the same in everyone else bringing to the fore the basic anxiety associated with Gothic works.

In short, he was everybody boiled down to a drop. Everybody is two being: one lives and flourishes in daylight and stands guard. The Other being walks and howls at night. (Moses 60)

Hence, Edwards is not wrong in calling him a “Jekyll-and-Hyde figure”(Edwards 1094). He lectures people to uphold idealistic values of democracy, but cannot tolerate any opposition. He upholds the idea that every man “must make his own emancipation”, but while passing his legacy to Joshua he says that he cannot have “a
state of individuals. Everybody just cannot be allowed to as they please” (Moses 13). Also, even after renouncing violence, he kills Aaron. The Hebrews do not trust upon Moses’ power of voodoo. They are perennially in fear of his rod and his right hand and for every offence committed, they are worried if “he ain’t in the notion of putting no plague [on us]...is he?” If they forget about his powers, he is quick to remind them that he is the ruler. Moses decides to have some patience about the Hebrews, but joined together in a rebellion, as Moses goes to have a conversation with God, the Hebrews make a calf of gold and begin ritualistic worship at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses is wildly outraged to see them engaged in the worship of their pagan gods and decrees that all those who participated in the idol worship shall be killed,

“If this is to be great nation, it must be purged of such evil-doers, or all Israel must perish. You have eager weapons, men. Spare not a soul who is guilty”...For hours there were fleeing and screaming and hiding and bloody swords (Moses 239).

Till now, Moses was on the side of the Hebrews, but now the Hebrews realize that anyone who will not follow Moses shall be wiped out and “every eye in Israel followed him in fear” (Moses 240). After the episode of the calf, Moses ceases to have any sympathy with the Hebrews. For little mistakes, he made sure they suffered immensely in the form of diseases and various such means of chastisement. The Hebrews wish to outdo Moses again by trying to kill him as they refuse to fight against the Other tribes, but Moses wishes them to do so. It is now that he shows his most horrific side, he does nothing but falls on his face after the Princes enter his tent. Miriam interprets this as a bad sign and asks all to comply with his wishes in order to avoid any harm to themselves.

A great gasp went up from the Princes and the people outside crowded back from the door in some nameless fear. The figure of Moses on the ground did not look helpless somehow. It inspired more terror than it would have even with the uplifted hand. Everybody shrunk away as far as they could... Not a man in Israel would have touched him. Their weapons were frozen in their hands, though the wish for his death was in the minds of many Princes and Elders. Moses sensed his victory and stood erect. (Moses 258)
Here we witness that “Jethro’s creation has like the monster in Mary Shelley’s Gothic novel, become a threat to the nation” (Edwards 1094). The awe and the terror Moses inspires in the hearts of people was invincible due to their own experiences. Now the Hebrews are subject to the monster’s rule. He sentences them to wander in the desert for forty years so that he can “mold a nation” (Moses 260). Ilana Pardes, cited by Omar-Sherman, observes that the biblical desert is a complicated space of identities that are unclear, skepticism that is intense, and official narratives of the nation that are repeatedly interrogated. Unlike its ordained ruler, the desert wanderers are “confused and fearful about homecoming,” unsure about how they are bound together in this community.

The wandering Israelites are skeptical about the very premise that Canaan is their homeland. The only land they wish to return to is Egypt. But they end up in the wilderness, between Egypt and the Promised Land, returning to neither. (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 127)

The people were sent away “[t]o wander and to fall down and to. die in strange places where nobody lived and nobody would live again for thousands of years” (Moses 259-60). Consequently, what Britt indicates it is difficult to “reconcile the Moses of magic and violence with Moses of traditional piety and humanism” (Britt 39). Such duality reflects the dichotomy that Gothic works are often replete with.

Lackey also examines the character of Moses to find similar tendencies as indicated by Hurston. He notes that over the years the signification of Moses for black people has changed from being a liberator to an oppressor. Moses, as Lackey indicates, is rather an “empty signifier, a semiotic vicinity that could be used to liberate the oppressed but also to re-enslave the liberated” (Lackey 578). The African-Americans saw Moses as a liberator, but his portrayal by Hurston and statements by Richard Wright suggested that the African-American people should not consider Moses as an ideal leader. This disbelief in Moses, Lackey explains, could also be a result of the anti-religion drive in the Harlem Renaissance period. Britt builds on this argument to suggest that.

Hurston shows and even invents violent dimensions in the Moses story, not to celebrate violence but to recognize it and, more importantly, to show the whitewashing of violence out of biblical retellings (Britt 32).
Scholars and intellectuals noted that religious scriptures justified racial supremacy of the white people. Most of these scholars noticed that “while the Bible empowered the minority communities to experience some liberation, it simultaneously empowered dominant communities to expand their oppressive power” (Lackey 581). Moreover, often a skeptic, Hurston displayed her disdain or lack of understanding about the idea that why, if there were a God, he or she would reveal himself to the chosen few. In Moses also, Lackey notes, Hurston presents God as “an empty signifier” (581). As per Hurston, God was used to fulfill imperialist ambitions of the dominant. He was indeed “a communal projection of ideologically driven humans, and as such it frequently becomes an instrument that justifies subjugation and when necessary, violence” (Lackey 582). This idea of God as an agency to perpetrate the threat of the chosen few – in the novel the Pharaoh and Moses- which is voiced by the author in the conversation between the two Hebrews Caleb and Amram, in which Caleb wishes or a just and benevolent God and Amram (the supposed father of Moses), reaches the conclusion that God is simply a mental projection. The characters become the voice of a skeptical Hurston who saw God a means to divide people into categories, where the majority labored and the minority reaped the benefits. Time and again, in the name of God, the rulers unleashed terror upon the masses as the chosen ones. The creed of monotheism, promoted by Moses, ensured that all the people are under imperialist forces. Thus, religion fulfilled the aspirations of those who wished to rule. Lackey clarifies that Moses is an empty signifier as he is seen as a liberator by the blacks and political supremacist by the whites. Hence, he is a representative of both-those who are enslaved and those who enslave. This renders the people, as Hurston suggests, experimental subjects.

Moses did not care a fig for those Hebrew people. Moses had worked out an idea for a theocratic government, and the Hebrews were just so available laboratory material (Dust Tracks on the Road 529-30).

Lackey, quite appropriately, examines how violence is justified in the name of religion and regards Moses “the original criminal, the parent of all our Western political woes” (Lackey 585).

The authoritarian style of Moses’ leadership is also read in terms of “gendered violence” by Erica R. Edwards. Omar-Sherman argues that modern feminist critics
look at the Bible through the perspective of gender and find that though it acknowledges “the rationale that female nurturing capacities are indispensable to individuals, society and nation” after the domestic/reproductive agenda is fulfilled, the text’s gender politics “wisk them off [the stage] at once in order to make place for the ‘real’ figures of history—the fathers” (qtd. in Omar-Sherman 135). It cannot be denied that in the narratives of the history of the world, whether it is about class struggle or empire building, it is more often than not, the males who are in the center of the action. Strasser and Tinsman call this world history a “mega-narrative” (Strasser and Tinsman 78). Conventionally, a male figure is in the center of such a mega-narrative. Hurston seeks to show that when the force of a woman threatens the male domain of nation building and history making, what usually happens is the deletion of that threat from the history and its narratives. Edwards argues that in the novel Hurston presents Moses as a supreme masculine force while the female voice is neatly and conveniently silenced.

Hurston’s revision of Exodus is not a simple translation, rather it is a genre shifting narrative that rewrites the political romance of Exodus as a horror fiction, a satirical cautionary tale about the gendered violence that often founds charismatic leadership, writing the story as a Gothic tale rather than as a romance (Edwards 1085).

Edwards if of the view that the discourse on black leadership is also a discourse where masculinity finds stronghold. From this discourse of liberation and freedom, femininity is systematically dissociated. This representation of gender violence is quite different from Hurston’s earlier representation of violence in heterosexual relationships. From the domestic realm, we see Hurston engaging in a powerful discourse about the silencing of women not in the domestic, but also in the political arena. Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman in their study about Kurdish women’s organizing in the diaspora, indicate that women are a victim of gender-violence and oppression during the time when any nation goes through reconstruction (Mojab and Gorman 59). It is this vulnerability that largely curbs their participation in the process of reconstruction and nation building. With regard to protests against the totalitarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya, Faheda M. Totah also observes that,
Although both women and men demonstrated for the removal of dictators in their respective countries, in Tunisia and Egypt for instance women were sexually harassed and physically abused for making overt political demands in public spaces (2).

It is this endangering of the female in the political life and the violence it might incur, which leads Hurston to also pay attention to a hidden side of the nation building process. Political participation of women is discouraged as it threatens to defile the culture for which the females are seen to be appropriate agents, the carriers of familial ‘purity’. Participation of women, as Totah further says, is encouraged only if they do not threaten the masculine zone of action. The political charismatic behavior of Moses, which is seen as harbinger of emancipation also has dark recesses, as it obliterates the female experience. Judith Butler derives her idea of gender exclusion from Plato to say that a man perpetuates the notion of his intelligence and rationality through the exclusion of women, slave and children (Sherman 135). Hence, though Moses and his political leadership promises freedom, it also brings to the fore the dangers inherent in such a model of leadership. Edwards explicates how the Black preachers have repeatedly invoked the stories of Exodus and the Moses figure has forever been associated with emancipation of the black masses. The oppressed people have found in the Hebrews their counterpart and have remained faithful and hopeful towards a leader like Moses who could deliver them from their abject existence. Thus, equating any black leader with Moses is not a far-fetched parallel. However, little do the oppressed realize that such political leadership is primarily masculine and does not endorse female participation in the journey towards freedom. McDowell observes how Moses is advised only by males, to imply that it is only through male wisdom Moses is able to undertake he great task and prepare himself suitably for it. First it is Mentu, who guides Moses in the art of warfare so that he turns out to be a great warrior. Thereafter, it is Jethro, who advises and teaches Moses about voodoo and directs him to the Book of Thoth. And most important example of male bonding, as McDowell asserts is the relationship between Moses and God, who changes the course of his life. The future also seems quite bleak for female leadership as Moses chooses to make Joshua a successor of his task of the Promised Land. It can be said that, “[w]omen are thus secondary and peripheral to the strategies and demands of nation-building, forming at best a caste within a nation (McDowell 15).
The black leader is more often than not imagined or envisioned as a male, not a female. Thus, “the narration of Exodus is dangerous for egalitarian notions of gender and peoplehood” (Edwards 1088). The clash between the Hebrew God and the Egyptian Pharaoh in the very beginning establishes that the book primarily is a narration of masculinity. The rod that Moses carries with himself is a phallic symbol, which establishes the power and supremacy of a male God. Ilona Rashnow also adds that in the book the Egyptian goddess of fertility has been replaced by a male God with a male agent (Moses), who transmits God’s messages to the people. The idea of Moses as a deliverer of justice overshadows the fact that beneath such promise of liberation, the females are still in danger of violence and execution, and for this reason, the figure of Moses is an ambivalent hero, may be even a “villain and a murderer” (qtd. in Edwards 1089). The idea of killing for gaining political power is not alien to religious texts, as Renita Weems points out. Repeatedly, black women have been called to pay “attention to [biblical texts] where individuals (both male and female) are slaughtered, subjugated, silences or isolated as a result of their identity” (qtd. in Edwards 1089).

The tale in Hurston’s novel, Edwards asserts, is a Gothic one as till the very end Moses is a very ambiguous character. Along with being a historical figure and a character in Hurston’s text, Moses also qualifies to be a tyrant by repeatedly smothering the female experience, or female threat to his totalitarian power. He “crushes women’s desire and buries them under a stifling, male-originating logos” (Edwards 1090). Moses displays this extinguishing of the female voice most noticeably in the figure of Miriam. It is this subordinated voice that Hurston seeks to unleash in Moses. In fact, she can be said to be one of the female writers who sought to give representation to the female voice in the twentieth century. Miriam is the daughter of Amram and the alleged sister of Moses. In the beginning of the story, we notice that Miriam is unable to see what happened to his brother set afloat in the river as she is quite captivated by the royal princess. In her stunned pleasure at gazing at the princess and her entourage, she forgets to keep track of her brother, and for the fear of being punished, concocts a story about how her brother was taken by the princess. This story gains prominence among the Hebrews as it implies that one of their own kinds lives in the palace of the Pharaoh. Hence, it is the narrative set into motion by Miriam that leads to the central action. However, soon after Miriam
vanishes from the narrative, as the text indulges in detailed account of Moses and his various accomplishments. As a result Miriam’s story is buried in the text, “[t]he textual burial of Miriam in Moses, Man of the Mountain underscores the narrative draw of male-centered charismatic heroism” (Edwards 1092). Miriam is a well-known Hebrew prophet but Moses feels threatened with her power from the start as she repeatedly keeps on asserting her hold over the Hebrews through Aaron.

You don’t give us no credit at all. You and Joshua is everything and me and Aaron ain’t nothing. And we’re the very ones that got them things together and held it together all down the line (Moses 213).

She tries to break free of the gender hierarchy in the political realm and tries to assert her power now and then through speaking.

As Zipporah, Moses’ wife, joins the camp of the Hebrews, we see how Hurston evokes a “dichotomy between the Gothic femme fatale and the ideal woman” (Edwards 1096), quite similar to the doubling of Bertha Mason and Jane in Bronte’s Jane Eyre. Miriam draws pity from Zipporah, the ideal woman, who is an object of fantasy for all men,

Isn’t that Miriam – that bitter looking old woman?...Oh ! she just has the look of never having been loved. She has that terrible look of never having been nuded by a man (Moses 247).

And Miriam on the Other hand is made more conscious of her disfigured body over the years due to slavery over the years, and notices the stark contrast between her squalid, and Zipporah’s regal existence,

She looked again and saw well-cared for hands and feet of Zipporah and looked at her own gnarled fists and her square feet all twisted and coarsened by slavery, and almost snarled out loud (Moses 219).

Feeling like a subhuman figure, she feels that Zipporah was stealing whatever support she has garnered over the years with her diva-like looks. To voice her anger she speaks to Aaron and Moses. Repeated assertion of power through speaking makes her a conspicuous figure among the Hebrews and a greater hazard to Moses’ despotic reign. Miriam’s character is a employed to show how for the notions of nationalism
and masculinity, “the feminine is a problem” (McDowell 16). Thus, to silence her once and for all, she is called into Moses’ tent, which here acquires a symbolic connotation similar to the concentration camps in Germany. As she goes inside the Tent of Testimony she is struck with leprosy by the cloud and after this “[a]ll the rest of her days, Miriam was very silent” (Moses 246). Though Miriam is not killed by Moses, her life in death situation serves as a lesson to all the Hebrews about Moses’ one-man regime. Struck by leprosy, Miriam becomes “a spectacle of abjection” (Edwards 1097). Edwards draws attention towards the fact that she is subdued and suppresses till she is actually branded a monster. Later in her life she tries to explain that it was not some divine rule of punishment that turned her into a leper, but Moses’ right hand.

Punished for her transgression of gendered notion of propriety and her violation of the structure of charismatic authority in which one male voice speaks for the Voice, Miriam is sentenced to a life covered by a “veil between her and the world which never lifted” (Edwards 1098-99).

Miriam’s story tarnishes the story of the charismatic black leadership of Moses. During her last days, Miriam, greatly defeated, tells Moses that though the Hebrew people have attained freedom, she could not gather the will to live as she “ain’t been so happy” (262). She wishes to die and in this context as Edwards observes, for some, freedom is death.

I made up my mind to fight your power with mine. But I found out that I was no more against you than a grain of sand against a mountain, because you beat me and bottled me up inside of my own body and you been keeping me in jail inside myself ever since. Turn me loose, Moses, so that I can go and die (Moses 264).

Seen in light of such sentiments, Edwards is not wrong when she calls Miriam a “feminist martyr”, who died as a representative of female voice amongst the Hebrews. However, her story is “black leadership’s Gothic tale” (Edwards 1100), something that seems unavoidable in a man’s struggle to attain absolute power.

Melanie J. Wright also asserts that gender politics in the novel largely goes unnoticed. She indicates how Moses, hailed as the liberator of the Hebrews, is able to survive in
Egypt only because of the bravado shown by many women, such as Jochebed, Miriam and the Egyptian princess. Jochebed is a courageous mother who is resolved to save her son despite the fatal laws of the Pharaoh, even though her husband is perpetually terrorized about the discovery of a male baby in their house. Most of the women in the novel, Wright asserts, are presented from the androcentric perspective, thought of as capable of handling only private sphere (Amram repeatedly thinks Jochebed to be so), as having less intellect (Zipporah cannot understand Moses’ great task and dreams of being a queen), and as those who are unreliable. It is only Miriam whose portrayal is somewhat pronounced, only to be silenced after being struck by leprosy. Moses does realize that if Miriam had not floated those stories of him being adopted and being a Hebrew, he would not have been able to attain all the knowledge that he is the master of. In spite of her foundational role, she finds “her prophetic leadership role bittered and sidelined in the new postslavery order” (Wright 76). Amram repeatedly rejects his wife’s ideas about saving the child. Jethro also cautions Moses that he should not pay much attention to Zipporah. Hence, the novel shows how the biblical women find their potential denied and their actuality diminished in the wake of a supposed liberation event. [the novel also] offers much in sympathy with the modern feminist enterprise by laying bare the dynamics of patriarchy and subtly undermining the authoritarian and absolute claims of its product, the received, redacted biblical text (Wright 77).

Through the portrayal of biblical women and their obliteration from the history-changing event of the Exodus, Hurston actually forebodes the burial of her own texts and her voice as a female writer. The gender politics of the novel and the treatment meted out to Miriam is also significant because Hurston herself was a victim of sexism in her literary career. Deborah McDowell quite correctly sees the novel as implying that in patriarchy the position of females is only to follow the males,

Although the woman’s voice opens the text, speaking the anguish of childbirth, women’s voices and desires are hushed and trivialized throughout, subordinated to the greatness of the male (14).

The marginalization of women in the political sphere is conspicuous. N. Bheachain mentions how a group of female activists in Dublin around 1927 and 1931, following the civil war, distributed leaflets describing themselves as “Ghosts”. This was because
these female activists who were on the peripheries of the political sphere understood themselves as “ghostly revenants in the public life of the now Free State” (Bheachain 37), as they felt betrayed, horrified and alienated due to the Anglo-Irish treaty. Thus, the narrative of nation building totally deletes women from its history or its present.

The usage of Gothic elements such as these makes the text not a tale of an ideal black leader that many critics have chosen to see Moses as. An analysis of Moses’ political strategies put him in the category of a despotic ruler, who cannot see any other way except for his own.

**Seraph On The Suwanee (1942)**

Hurston’s last novel, on the lives of whites rather than African-Americans, invited immense criticism. The fact that she chose to depict the lives of whites instead of blacks, was not received very well by black critics and readers. To add to the problem, the novel was criticized as badly written. Even Alice Walker, who otherwise championed the ethos promoted in Hurston’s works, did not react very well to the book calling it, “reactionary, static, shockingly misguided and timid” (Afterword xiv).

However, recently there has been what we can call a revisiting of the text by many critics who do not see the novel as a total failure. For them it is not as phenomenal as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but also nothing that could be dismissed outrightly without having any value whatsoever among Hurston’s works. The novel’s time of publishing coincided with an episode that brought great infamy to Hurston. This was a charge of child molestation that ended up devastating Hurston’s career. Though she was acquitted from this charge, yet the damage done to her reputation and career was irreparable and irreversible. Some passages of *Seraph* were also quoted in the court to prove that Hurston was indeed a child molester. Hence, both these reasons- the book not being about whites and the charges of child sexual abuse, led to a decline in Hurston’s readers and admirers. All these factors conspired towards the fact that Hurston was dismissed from the literary scene to die in destitution and misery, with her works not receiving their due place in the canon of American literature till they were discovered by Alice Walker. *Seraph* is a work of Hurston’s last years and hence we find in this novel a certain maturity that is usually found in the works of many writers in their later works. The passion and rigour that we see in her earlier works, though not absent, but is decreased here.
Like her other works on the life about the American South, *Seraph* also mirrors the lives of Southerners but this time the people whom Hurston chose to represent were not black but whites. This might lead to the question whether the Gothic would be able assert its presence successfully in a text about whites or not. The idea that Hurston probably wished to voice was that irrespective of race, everyday existence in the South is terrifying and intermingled with the dread and trepidation. As the horror associated with the South is inextricably associated with the atrocities of the whites towards the blacks, it is a doubtful as to how Hurston would depict the presence of terror and horror about everyday lives of whites. Thus, to create an effect of terror in the existence of whites Hurston chose not to separate them from the South and situate the whites also in the geographical location associated with the horror of quotidian.

Deeply connected to the Gothic fiction is the idea of deformity and disability. The notion of disability or deformity goes against the notion of a whole body, perfect in its configuration. Thus, as Anolik regards, “In a society that dehumanizes deviation, this diagnosis amounts to diagnosing deviance as inhuman, as monstrous. The non-normative human is thus transformed into a demon” (Anolik 6). In literature such as The Bible, works of Shakespeare, Montaigne and Melville, the idea of outer deformity, Anolik suggests has often been linked to inner depravity. In the novel a pertinent motif that voices the perturbation of the contaminating influences of the cracker culture is Arvay’s first child Earl. The child is a reflection of Arvay’s inner fears about her love for Carl Middleton, as she feels that it is not right for her to love her sister’s husband and to harbor sexual desires for him. After her marriage Arvay is in constant fear about her previous feelings for Carl and she being a devout Christian feels the need for punishment. During her first pregnancy Arvay is fearful about living in Sawley as she feels that her sister knows about her love for Carl and might tell Jim about it. This constant guilt and fear comes out personified in the form of Earl, Arvay’s deformed and mentally challenged child. Human society privileges those who are able and normal above those who are disabled who are seen as subhuman or inhuman. The way Arvay reacts after seeing the child after he is born is quite similar the definition of monster explicated by Derrida, who says that,

A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name...simply it shows himself - that is the etymological meaning of “monster”(from the Latin “monstrate”/to show). It shows itself as a thing that has never been shown.
before and which therefore looks like a hallucination whose sight strikes us and scares us precisely because nothing could have helped us anticipate and identify this figure (qtd, in Anolik 92).

As Arvay gives birth to Earl, she is at first disappointed to see that the child is a blond but “What else she saw made Arvay cry out in horror”,

“Dessie! Dessie! What is the matter with my child’s hands?”

“It would tell a God to tell, Miz’ Arvay. Them don’t look much like fingers, do they?”

“Good gracious! They look more like strings, And his hands Dessie. Why they look too little for his body” (SS 67).

Arvay notices thereafter that there was practically no forehead nor backhead on her child. The head narrowed like egg on the top...The feet...looked too long for a new-born baby to have...no arch to the tiny feet. They were perfectly flat, with a little lump of flesh huddled under what should have been the in-step (SS 68).

The child had a very tiny mouth but he “attacked ferociously when put to the breast”, which makes Jim to say once that “that young ‘un would eat you clean up”(69). French physician Francois Bouchard proclaimed in his study in 1672 that a child who has two heads, or any superfluous limb or any part of the body “mutilated or maimed” can well be called a monster child as it is against the order of nature. Earl’s deformity and mentally unstable condition can be well attributed to Arvay’s thoughts during her pregnancy.

In Gothic literature, deformity is often associated with monstrosity as a consequence of repression. Erika Hess in her introduction to ‘Literary Hybrids’ cites Huet’s study on deformity, which showed that from the classical times to the Enlightenment, there is an idea that recurs constantly, that of the monstrous child being the result of mother’s “fickle and powerful imagination”(Hess 11). The thought of the mother during her period of child bearing, Huet opines, made the child carry “the marks of her whims and fancy rather than the recognizable feature of its legitimate genitor”(1).
Huet further emphasized that monstrous children were an image of the mother’s secret and passionate desires that have not been fulfilled. Thus, the child is a witness of the mother’s inner desires and both the monstrous child and the mother stand opposed to the law of the father. Also, in Gothic literature, the monstrous child symbolizes the Other, hence they haunt those bodies who are perfectly normal. As Price and Schildrick suggest this distancing or unacceptance of deformed bodies leaves an “irreducible trace, the specter of the Other who is at the same time the self.” (qtd. in Surrey 106). This postulation can be seen as correct in the case of Arvay and Earl where Arvay’s fears and guilt associated with her life as a maiden, cause her to be constantly worried about her marriage with Jim. She herself sees Earl as “the punishment for the way I used to be…it must be the chastisement I been looking for” (69). Anolik points out towards the argument of Renee L. Bergland who in the *The National Uncanny* holds that “a literary consequence of repression is specialization” (Anolik 146), which for Arvay takes the form of Earl. Arvay’s cracker legacy can be associated with Earl’s deformity according to various eugenic reports. It is noteworthy how during her pregnancy, while Earl is still in her mother’s womb, he affirms his cracker connection, Arvay developed strange moods and appetites. A great craving for meat, and for clay. Arvay had seen many people in Sawley eat clay, but she had never touched it herself. Now she had a taste for clay, that fine, cream-colored clay which she had seen her mother eat all her life (SS 65).

She stealthily sends Dessie for the clay while the aristocratic Jim cautioned Arvay that he should see “any more of that goddamned filthy, dirty stuff” in their house. Another instance of Earl belonging closely to the cracker culture was the similarity that Arvay finds in Earl and her Uncle Chester, her maternal uncle, “who was sort of queer in his head”. As Jackson suggests, “For Arvay, Earl stands for both sexual guilt and cacogenicity, an ontogenic and phylogenetic signifier” (Jackson). Jackson also sees Earl as a double of Carl and holds that the fact Jim shows delay in naming the child, and lets Arvay do, so hints towards his hesitation to accept Earl in his lineage. Consequently, Jackson rightly perceives Earl’s deformed and monstrous existence as an abject body that has the potency of disrupting the civilized and civilizing forces of the capitalist white family due to its cracker connections. Arvay is constantly conscious of the way in which Jim is very affectionate towards Angeline and Kenny.
but not towards Earl. In one of her angry outbursts she equates Jim’s aristocratic connections with pure whiteness that is in danger if it accepts crackers as their own,

> You come from some big high muck-de-mucks, and we [Arvay and Earl] ain't nothing but piney-woods Crackers and poor white trash. Even niggers is better than we is, according to your kind.... Earl is always wrong because he's like my folks. 'Taint never nothing wrong with Angeline and Kenny because they take after your side (SS 126).

Kungal notices that mental disability is a “potent marker of the fearful Gothic Other who is clearly defined as inhumanly and monstrously different” (Kungal 170). This anxiety is constantly seen in Jim’s fussing over Earl till he finally meets an early and tragic death. Scahill draws attention towards the study done by Kori Bridotti who postulated that a monstrous child has been the object of study of both science and folklore and both reflect their anxiety over the power of the mother to bear children who are monstrous or not normal. Scahill further observes that a deformed child has long been associated with challenging the taboos in a civilized and orderly society. He sheds light on the study of birth defects called ‘teratogenesis’ literally meaning monster birth. Hence, the notion that deformity is inextricable from monstrosity in a civilization fond of maintaining boundaries, finds place not only in society but also science. Birth defects according to Scahill, manifests larger concerns, for instance,

> the terror of taboo sexual practices such as incest and inbreeding, the drama of parental neglect and ignorance, or the reaffirmation of the primacy of industrialized nations over impoverished “primitive” or “Third -World” nations (Scahill 270).

Scahill conceptualizes the Gynaeceological Gothic, which is based on the debates about the life and death of all those infants who are considered away from normal and hence not fit to occupy a place in the normative population. The fear of contamination from the inhuman is a source of anxiety in the general population. Thus, Gynaeceological Gothic according to Scahill is concerned with the fetus that is halfway between marvel and monster...the infantile beast [that] haunts the mother from the catacombs of her anatomy, and when it reaches the surface it
learns to hate the world that hates it for its ugliness, for its intolerable ambiguity, and for the “wrongness” of its existence (Scahill 208).

All these threats join to form a Gothic and terrifying narrative. In the novel also we see that Jim is primarily indifferent towards Earl and he grows up to be a child that feels threatened by slightest of things and “any strange object introduced into his presence brought screams of terror”(70). Earl is unable to receive the new tenants on their land in a positive manner and Arvay is startled to find Earl making strange animal voices, and saw him

bent over his head and nose thrust forward and running and turning back on his course and running like a hound dog hunting for the scent...Whining and whimpering and making growly noises in his throat from time to time... He only saw the opening, and dashed and sprung for it, knocking Arvay down...leaping through the kitchen door (SS 123).

In these lines we clearly see the grown-up Earl behaving in an animalistic fashion without the slightest trace of humanity in him. Jim in his discussion with Arvay recollects an incident when Earl pressed the trigger of an unloaded gun at Kenny many times, and the only reason Kenny was saved was because it was an unloaded gun. Earl’s deviant behaviour continues till he meets his death after trying to rape the daughter of Corregios, Lucy Ann. His vampirish attack on Lucy could be seen in the “[b]lood [that] was running down from a mangly spot on the side of her neck...[t]he fingers of the white hand that lay limply across her body were chewed and bloody...there was a bleeding wound on one thigh”(SS 143). An angry mob goes looking for Earl, while Earl hides in his own house and even as he tries to smother Arvay, she tells Earl to run away who also takes with him a rifle. He is found by the mob in the swamps and ultimately meets a gory death being shot by the mob. Hurston portrays in her book precisely the thing that was feared by a monstrous child and a cracker - that they would rupture the ideal American family by they deviant behavior or faulty genes. However, a Gothic text about monstrous children hints towards the fact that Scahill puts forth, that of monstrosity being present in the center of the ideal American family and that the American family should accept such deformity and monstrosity as the sign of modernism. As Scahill appropriately puts forth,
As an allegory of the real—the political, the psychological, the sociological — monstrous birth mobilizes our fears about the future moment that is, right now, gestating as an invisible presence within the present, that is waiting, perhaps not so patiently, to be born (Seahill 212).

Butler points out towards Lowe’s noteworthy interpretation of the death of Earl. As Lowe asserts, the event could convey that Hurston, through the killing of Earl by a lynching mob, wishes to suggest to white people as to what lynching might be for a white mother if her son is accused of rape and is killed in front of her eyes. This episode provides Hurston with the opportunity to depict the macabre practice of lynching. Sarah Gleeson suggests that the identity of the white woman in the South was also linked to the idea of protecting her from potential rapists and many African-Americans were brutally murdered as they were suspected of primitive sexual nature. Willis mentions two such brutal lynching cases in the South. The first one involved the lynching of Claude Neal in 1934 in Florida, who was accused of raping a white girl. Willis recounts that the mob was so violent that Neal was “tortured before being killed, mutilated, and partially dismembered” (Willis 164). The second case of lynching was of Joseph Showmaker, in 1935, also in Florida, who was, “whipped and beaten nearly to death and left to die, which he did several days later after being discovered and unsuccessfullly treated for his massive wounds”(Willis 164). In a nutshell, through the episode of Earl’s lynching, Hurston attempts to portray the same horror. This could also be an evidence of the fact that quite contrary to be beliefs of many black writers such as Richard Wright and Alain Locke, that Hurston did not present racial politics in her works, Hurston in her own way, through the use of such episodes, did offer her opinion on racism.

For depicting the consternation associated with the South in Seraph, Hurston selected the strata of people known as the ‘crackers’ in the South. The association of crackers with the degeneracy of the South accentuates the novel’s Gothicism. McWhiney sheds light on how the crackers were variously known as “‘piney-woods people’, ‘dirt-eaters’, ‘clay-eaters’, ‘sand-hillers’” etc., and the word cracker itself “has almost always been used disparagingly to describe the mudsills of the South” (McWhiney xiv). The lives of the crackers were not better than that of the blacks. Rather, some writers hint at the fact that even the blacks looked down upon the crackers because they could not be at the higher level of hierarchy as the white people of their own race.
The crackers occupied an ambiguous space in the power hierarchy in the South where they could neither command the respect of the blacks and suffer because of their skin colour, nor act all sophisticated and refined power-bearers like the whites. The crackers were an evidence of the degeneracy associated with the South in Southern Gothic works. Wray in his book-length study of the cracker culture *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, holds that according to the abolitionists, crackers were a downtrodden group of people because of the “social and economic environment of the slave South”(Wray 18). On the other hand, the category of people who supported slavery attributed their sordid and seedy existence to a faulty lineage.

The notion that the crackers are also possibly a result of sexual transgression indicates that the crackers were no different than the mulattos in symbolizing the prevalence of the horror of sexual transgression in the American Gothic literature. A noteworthy fact that Wray points out consolidates the relation between the Gothic genre and the depiction of the crackers, is that along with the Red Indians and the blacks, now the crackers also constituted the abject for the American nation. Wray cites a study by Richard Dugdale on the crackers - *The Jukes* in which Dugdale attributes the degeneracy of the crackers to bad genes which in turn are a result of incest and miscegenation – both issues of fundamental concern to the genre of American Gothic and define the nature of the category. The “poor white trash” were white, but also trash and as Newitz and Wray suggest, this nomenclature indicated at something which needs to be disposed off so that the white identity could be maintained without any pollution. However, irrespective of their correctness, both reasons hint at the fundamental depravity associated with the Southern existence.

One of the elements that constitute the core of any Gothic work is the idea of Otherness that it formulates. Often this idea is manifest through the abject. That which is abjected exists on the borderlines. The abject constantly threatens the self and this leads to the horror that is depicted in the Gothic narratives. Charles Jackson in his significant study on *Seraph on the Suwanee* focuses on the depiction of the cracker culture in the book. He also associates the book with the notion of eugenics and abjection to say that Hurston portrays the poor white culture as an abject identity in America. As per Jackson, the American nation needs to be purged of this identity so that the whole nation is not infected with its degenerative effect. As explicated in
Jonah’s Gourd Vine, the abject identity is that part which needs to be disposed off. Jackson cites Laura Doyle who stressed on the idea of eugenics gaining great importance in America during the period 1900-1940. "the era of the Harlem Renaissance and of modernism was also the era of eugenics”(qtd. in Jackson). As Jackson opines, “A cultural paranoia over defective germ-plasm helped to shape a national conversation about how good and bad marriages and selective breeding might affect the strength of a (white) American future “(Jackson). Talking of cultural anxieties, one of prime concerns of the Gothic, we can say that Hurston through her work wanted to draw attention towards yet another group of people whom the American nation wanted to get rid off in order to secure and stabilize their existence. This abjection of the crackers may be seen in relation to Kristeva’s postulation about a whole stratum of people being regarded as abject,

It is as if dividing lines were built up between society and a certain nature, As well as within the social aggregate, on the simple logic of excluding filth, which, promoted to the ritual level of defilement, founded the “self and clean” of each social group if not of each subject...Defilement is what is jettisoned from the “symbolic system” (Kristeva 65, original italics).

As Jackson also holds that by seeing a correlation between the eugenic reports which separated the good genes from the bad genes and Hurston’s book about the crackers, we can measure the importance of Seraph in adding to the concern about the poor whites and their abject status. The detailed format of these reports, as Jackson observes, depicted that for a pure white America, and for a stable future, the population of the crackers needed to be limited. Hence, as Jackson pertinently holds, “Hurston's Seraph both participates in and resists - perhaps even at times parodies - a eugenic ideology of tainted blood.”(Jackson). The kind of setting Hurston presents the “poor white trash” in, is conspicuously similar to the description in various eugenic reports.

The life of Sawley streamed out from the sawmill and the "teppentime" still. Then, too, there was ignorance and poverty, and the ever-present hookworm. The farms and the scanty flowers in front yards and in tin cans and buckets looked like the people.... Brock Henson was a Cracker from way back. . . . [He] had never made as much as a hundred dollars in any month of his life. The family lived in a clapboard house more than two miles east of the heart of Sawley.... [The house] was now a rusty, splotchy gray-brown. Only one room
in the house, the parlor, was ceilinged overhead. In the two bedrooms and the kitchen, the rafters were bare and skinny. (SS 1-9)

In this squalid community, Arvay the protagonist of the novel lives a life of self-imposed ban on courtship, as she could not marry the man she loved. This man, Reverend Carl Middleton, now the husband of her voluptuous sister Lorraine, is a weak man who easily succumbs to the charms of Lorraine over Arvay. She thinks that she lives in “mental adultery” with him. Due to her lack of interest in any marriage proposals and having reached at the age of twenty-one without marriage, she is an object of ridicule and gossip. Thus, Jackson suggests that Arvay lives an ‘Othered’ existence in a community which is already the Other for the American nation. Arvay’s position as a white woman is also made complicated due to her cracker roots. Though she fulfills the criteria of being a perfect white maiden with her blonde hair, blue eyes, and petite and frail figure, yet she cannot sever herself from her lineage. She is white woman but she is powerless suggesting that

Hurston’s depiction of poor white Southerners traces a schizophrenic whiteness that is divided against itself, a myth of supremacy concealing a sense of economic and cultural inadequacy, anxiety and degradation. (Konzett 138)

As Konzett suggests, Arvay need to be rescued from her cracker connections and this is what precisely Jim does for Arvay for which she feels quite patronized and is unable to leave Jim even after the isolation and entrapment she feels in her marriage.

The trope of the abject is also aligned with the American South as the region is an abject geographical location. Goddu opines that the South is the reservoir of all that the American nation wishes to repress and hide about itself, so that the discourse of the American Dream persists with any conflicting narratives. The savagery and barbarity of the white towards the blacks in this region, makes its presence threatening for the American stories of success and materialistic triumph. This abject geographical location keeps coming to the fore in the novel through various means such as Arvay’s madness and her first child Earl, both of which shall be studied later in the analysis. Sawley does not disappears from the novel even after Arvay’s marriage to Jim and keeps haunting Arvay. When in the later half on the book Arvay pays a visit to Sawley mentally prepared to leave Jim and the materialistic comfort he has provided her, Arvay gets a reality check. On reaching Sawley she sees that the
already seedy house is in a terrible condition. Her sister Larraine is “in a ton of coarse-looking flesh, a cheap cotton dress and dirty white cotton stockings...Her gray hair was bobbed and untidy”(274), the man whom she loved hopelessly at sixteen was “[a] soiled, heavy-set man...drab creature...His face marred and his body shaped by making too many humble motions”(275). Their two daughters were “mule faced and ugly enough”. She cannot tolerate the idea of being married to someone like Carl Middleton now and realized the difference between their status.

But for ‘Raine’s intervention, she might have been married to Carl. Being the mother of those awful-looking young men and women that he had fathered.

   Had to get in bed with something like that! Do Jesus! (SS 277).

The house in which she lived as a maiden, is no better with “the squeak and patter of rats in the walls. What was worse, she could smell the strong odor of rat-urine over everything” (276). Arvay’s mother informs of the crafty plans of Larraine and Carl “[d]isfurnishing me of the little money you sent me, and piling here and destroying up the groceries ...Stuff they trashy guts and lay ‘round like gators in the sun”(278). Kristeva in her treatise on abjection deems the corpse the greatest form of abjection. Thus, the corpse of Arvay’s dead mother, Jackson opines, is the concentrated form of the abjection of whole cracker community. Once Arvay’s mother is dead, this abjection of the poor, white, cracker existence is passed on to the house which Arvay inherits and is now robbed by Larraine and Carl of whatever little possessions it had.

   It was an evil, ill-deformed monstropolous accumulation of time and scum. It had soaked in so much of doing-without, of soul-starvation, of brutish vacancy of aim, of absent dreams, envy of trifles, ambitions for littleness, smothered cries and trampled love, that it was a sanctuary of tiny and sanctioned vice...its fumes and vapors had stuck to her sufficiently to scar Jim and bruise her children. There was no getting away from it....The house had caught a distemper from the people who had lived in it, and had then diseased up people. It caught people and twisted the limbs of their minds. What was in its craw gave off bad breath (SS 306).

It is only through the burning of this house that Arvay is able to free herself of her degenerate past to move towards a hopeful future with Jim after her life has constantly been lived in the anxiety about her cracker inheritance. This hope, quite
obviously, is constituted of pure whiteness minus any contamination from her cracker legacy. The house here acquires Gothic dimensions as Jackson observes that it comes to symbolize the abnormality, disfigurement, vileness and malevolence of Arvay’s white cracker existence. The description of the house here mirrors the houses in the tradition of American Gothic which came to represent the same kind of horror such as in Poe’s *The House of the Usher* and Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*.

The relationship between Arvay and Jim is another element in the novel that characterizes it as a novel written about the American South. Rita C. Butler in her study on the power relations in the novel analyses the presence of oppressiveness in the marriage of the two protagonists. Butler opines that the relationship between Jim and Arvay is pathological and smacks more of relationship between “victim and oppressor” (Butler 32). From the very beginning in their relationship, we see that their lies the problem of being a white woman who rises to upper-middle class after being a cracker. As Lorde opines, “hating the right people” and marrying the right man are often requirements for white women who want to “co-exist with patriarchy in relative peace” (qtd. in Butler 39). Butler primarily focuses on the idea of narcissism present in the book that is the result of pathological relationship between white people in the country, and this is what Hurston precisely wanted to show in *Seraph*. Arvay’s position in the marriage from the very beginning is that of an “outsider within”, a term Butler quotes by Patricia Collins, to suggest those spaces where power in the society is not distributed equally. Butler builds her argument on the fact that the patriarchal forces use the maternal energies for their use but do not give equal space to the mothers who provide to the family.

According to Butler, the novel is an example of “maternal exploitation” and it is to be observed how this latent theme in the book dominates the tale of Jim Meserve in the book, as the champion of bourgeoisie values. Characterizing the woman as the Other is a concept that gained imminence with the white colonization of America. Paula Gune Allen describes that the native Indians culture in America was systematically replaced by the patriarchal culture. The families living in a community or a tribe was replaced by nuclear families. In the native Indian way of living, Allen regards, women were regarded as ones possessing equal faculties of mind and intelligence. What we see in *Seraph*, is quite opposite of what we see in case of Jim, who in the beginning of his relationship with Arvay asserts quite decidedly that
Women folks were not given to thinking nohow. It was not in their make-up to do so much thinking. That was what men were made for. Women were made to hover and to feel (SS 105).

Butler rightly asserts that Jim cannot associate his mind with the idea of a woman with a capacity to exercise her brain, reason, rationale or logic. Throughout their marriage Butler asserts Jim feels constantly threatened by Arvay’s femininity which refuses to settle down and tied-down to Jim’s home. He cannot control her, so he threatens her against exercising the power of her mind.

In *Seraph*, maternal energy, whether expressed in terms of female agency or embodied in nature, does not emerge as a powerful antidote or balance the rule of the father, but as a truncated force corrupted by patriarchy (Butler 59).

The cause of this exploitation of maternal forces lies around the moneymaking pursuits of the men in the book. The world of turpentine mills, the citrus production in Citrabelle and Jim’s shrimping business, all are presented as occupations where men extract and exploit as much as they can from nature. The failure of their relationship has its root cause in this exploitative tendency found in men and to make economic activity that results in money the focus of existence. This denies credit to the mothers and wives who toil without receiving any capital in return. The world where Hurston situated her text was perpetuated by those forces of neglect and restriction, which limit a woman to her household. Butler equates the stature of women in a white household with slavery advocated by many people as “both control the foundational fantasy” (Butler 76) of the world portrayed by Hurston. Hurston uses her feminist ideas in the book to depict the deterrent factors which do not allow a woman to be someone who participates in a productive activity. Luce Irigaray is of the view that motherhood is an illusion of power as “[h]er pleasure will find, in the child, compensations for and diversions from the frustrations that she too often encounters in sexual relation per se. Thus maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality” (Irigaray 27).

Early Gothic novels demonized the blacks and formulated the stereotype of black man as the rapist. This notion reinstated the power of the white male as the protector of the white woman and the black man as the Hurston in *Seraph on the Suwanee* subverts this notion and seems to contradict the idea that only the “primitive” black man has
the capability to sexually harm a white woman, as depicted in various early Gothic works. Through this episode of sexual assault, Hurston seems to put forth the idea that the black woman as well as the white woman is vulnerable and susceptible to the atrocity of rape by a white man. The event, which foreboded the strained relationship between Arvay and Jim, was that of Jim raping Arvay under the mulberry tree. Through her rendition of the marital relationship between Arvay and Jim, “Hurston adds to the traditional plot...psychosexual daily dramas and dilemmas of the marital here and now that disrupt the hearthside harmony of the “happily ever after” (DuCille 124). This is also much similar to Michelle A. Masse’s ‘marital Gothic’ explicated in the discussion of Their Eyes Were Watching God. A difference between Janie’s marriages and Arvay’s is that Janie is portrayed as a risk-taker, is childless and is able to keep moving in her quest for love. On the other hand Arvay chooses not to leave Jim in spite of feeling like doing so many times. Even when she actually leaves Jim’s house, she comes back to him. Before Jim gets married to Arvay he is tremendously confused about why Arvay holds back her love for him and is desperate to know the reason for this. The impetus for Jim’s rape is probably provided by Joe Kelsey’s (who later goes on to become Jim’s pet black) words to his overseer Jim, about how to handle women,

Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make ‘em knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in they mouth and ride ‘em hard and stop ‘em short. They’s all alike, Boss. Take them and break ‘em (SS 46).

Hurston’s depiction of the white man shows that his manhood lies in marking the female body with his stamp, as Dessie, Joe’s wife indicates. Dessie claims that fact Jim is a man is proved by Arvay’s impregnation. Such ideology where manhood is judged by one’s ability to establish control, even if brutal and callous, is liable to produce increased events of sexual assault. Thus, we see that the South acquires its terrifying reputation partly due to such biased attitudes. Although Arvay receives at twenty-one what Janie attains at the age of forty, yet Arvay is not able register Jim as the one who gratifies her mind and inner being. DuCille rightly opines,
The occasion of that initial passion is after all rape an act of violence and bestiality upon which we can hardly expect Arvay to build a healthy, loving relationship (DuCille 131).

In her marriage, Arvay is in a constant state of fear and neurotic anxiety, largely due to her various insecurities such as belonging to the cracker class and initially giving birth to a deformed child, Earl. Again and again Jim sexually objectifies her, calling her “my damn property”, and she feels smothered in her marriage but cannot express herself as she feels “tied and bound in a burning Hell”(218). Claudia Tate also observes that if we look beyond the conventional story that Seraph tells, we find “a more subversive story”, that of “the death of female desire in the fulfillment of romantic love” (Tate 151). DuCille suggests that various critics call Arvay a patient of hysteria and not wrongly so because she is “emotionally ensnared in a state of suspended animation caught between passion and resistance, desire and defiance”(DuCille 132). The paralysis in the communication between the husband and wife is present for a significant part of the novel. Time and again Jim tests Arvay’s love for him. In a shocking episode he starts playing with a rattlesnake, which in turn starts stifling Jim and Arvay is unable to rescue him as she has phobia of snakes. Arvay is paralyzed with fear and Jim sees this as Arvay’s reluctance to save him and endanger her own life. Robert Hemenway sees the snake as a symbol of phallus that raped Arvay. As Hemenway suggests the snake represents, “the evil that Jim’s sexuality presents to her fundamental Christian conscience…in their tempestuous intercourse”(Hemenway 311), and DuCille interprets the wrapping around of the snake as the revenge of the feminine.

In her analysis of the novel Claudia Tate cites Jessica Benjamin who explores the pattern of sadomasochism and uses it to define the pathological relationship of Arvay and Jim. As Savoy clarifies,

The subversion of the female gothic, then, is often compromised by the heroine’s masochistic desire for a lover who dominates her, whether this man is the woman’s father or a lover who merges with this figure. (184)

Morbidity, death and the death instinct are related to both – sadomasochism and the Gothic. Gilles and Deleuze hold that “[b]oth sadism and masochism imply that a particular quantity of libidinal energy be neutralized, desexualized, displaced and put at the service of Thanatos”(the death instinct)(qtd. in Strengell 110). Benjamin holds
that the sadist has the desire to control everything, but the masochist resists this control, due to which the sadist again and again indulges in replication of sadistic behavior, turning this into a vicious cycle. Arvay is unable to comprehend Jim and he repeatedly goes on inflicting terror on her in order to seek compliance from Arvay. Tate takes a step further to analyze the reason of Jim’s sadistic behavior and concludes that the root of it lies in Jim’s feeling of maternal loss over which he could exert no control. When Jim sees Arvay for the first time, he is fixated on her because it reminds him of his lost mother, who according to Tate could be said to be his object of fantasy in light of Freud’s Oedipal theory. Thus, to secure his relationship with her he constantly seeks to make sure that she loves him and is bound to him. However, this behavior instead of making their bond a consolidated one, makes it diseased and blighted. This pattern starts with Jim raping Arvay and marrying her, which Arvay considers an act of charity now that he had raped her. For the next twenty years she keeps on repaying the debt of this charitable behaviour from Jim. Once after Jim tells her to take all her clothes off, she is able to voice her feelings for once,

I can’t stand this bondage you got me in. I can’t endure no more. I can’t never feel satisfied that you got tied to me, and I can’t leave you, and I can’t kill you nor hurt you in no way at all. ..I can’t see never no peace of mind (SS 218).

Tate observes the rattlesnake incident as the climax of this sadomasochism after which their relationship suffers a final setback. Even at the end when Hurston suggests a happy ending, she means to also put across the idea that for women, love and self-discovery cannot go together and that female love and independence are polar opposites.

The psychological violence that characterizes Arvay’s marital relationship in the form of sado-masochism, also extends to estrangement from her children. Arvay as a mother fails to connect with any of her children not because she is a bad mother but because she is not given any chance to bond with her children or to decide or at least suggest her plans for her them. Marsha - Lockett is of the opinion that Arvay’s maternal forces are allowed to work only within the framework of patriarchy. As Marsha-Lockett suggests, [t]he text contains a fully developed portrait of a mother Arvay Henson Meserve, whose very mothering is a function of patriarchy and whose story is so psychologically violent that she cannot narrate it herself (Marsh-Lockett 101). The confines of patriarchy marginalize Arvay in her relationship with her children as she is almost always allowed to function within the guidelines provided by

112
her capitalist husband. Also in the novel the relationship between any mother and daughter is ruptured or fragmented due to the intervention of patriarchal forces. This “maternal impotence” (Marsh-Lockett 105), is a legacy that Arvay inherits from the relationship between herself and her mother. Their alliance is not given a chance to reach its real nature – that of love, warmth and affection by the dictates of Arvay’s father, whose attitudes towards Arvay shape that of Arvay’s mother’s. Both mother and father are inclined towards Larraine and think of Arvay as a burden because of her unmarried status at the age of twenty-one. The father constantly degrades Arvay and the mother joins him in this abasement. Arvay has seemingly renounced the world owing to the heartbreak caused by Carl Middleton marrying Larraine and when the handsome and other-worldly Jim starts courting her both the mother and the father join together to tell her that she cannot live permanently like a spinster.

Ain’t you never going to have sense enough to get yourself a husband? You intend to lay round here on me for the rest of your days and moan and pray? (SS 13)

To which Maria Henson adds that,

Arvay ain’t acting with no sense at all. Here all these gals around here ‘bout to bust they guts trying to git to him, and Arvay, that seems like she got the preference with him, trying to cut the tom fool. (SS 14)

Arvay is a victim of such constant belittling because she disagrees to get married. This pattern is passed on to Arvay as well, as Jim’s indifference towards Earl makes Arvay love him all the more. When Earl is chased by the mob after he has raped Lucy Ann, Arvay is denied the basic right of being a mother as Jim gives his approval for the treatment Earl receives from the outraged mob and is killed brutally by the crowd. Again Jim shows his callousness when he demands and insists on sexual intercourse while Arvay is still aggrieved over the death of her child. With respect to Arvay’s second pregnancy too, Arvay is unable to do much and is traumatized and terrified about the normality of the child so that she can heave a sigh of relief and bind Jim to herself forever. She lives under a state of perpetual fear about the fact whether the child will or will not fulfill Jim’s sense of fatherhood. It can be seen how there is a “diminished correlation between motherhood and personhood as the woman’s role as a womb emerges in the patriarchal schema of the novel” (Marsh-Lockett 104). Even after the birth of a normal daughter, Jim’s immense attachment to the child sets the stage for mother-daughter rivalry. As she grows up, Jim encourages Angeline’s
attachment to Hatton Howland at a very young age as this would promote his capitalist interests and literally dissociates Arvay from the daughter’s wedding as it is more of an elopement with Jim’s support. The subsequent success of the couple is also due to Jim’s guidance and involvement and as Marsh-Lockett observes, the mother is relegated to the background. In case of the third child Kenny as well, Jim takes the reins of his life and as Marsh-Lockett asserts, determines his psychological, social and professional life. Arvay’s maternal attachments are therefore again and again fractured because Jim dictates decisions as the master of the house. Doreen Fowler argues that in the system of slavery, maternal rights are denied to women, and hence slavery is anti-maternal. Arvay is just like a slave mother who has no rights over her own body or her children. Its noteworthy how Arvay once also thinks of her situation as that of a slave,

God, please have mercy on her poor soul, but she was a slave to that man! How? Why? Those were answers that were hidden away from her poor knowledge. All that she knew that it was so. (SS 134)

This shows that the enslaved South spares no mother from its tormenting history, whether black or white, in disintegrating the bond between a mother and her offspring.

Since the times of Hawthorne, wilderness was used in Gothic works to evoke a repository of dark thoughts and desires. As Weston opines the woods of Massachusets became in Hawthorne’s works “the ambivalent metaphoric equivalent of internal psychic enigmas, on the one hand, and the exhilarating but dangerous freedom from civilized society, on the other” (Weston 2). The use of wilderness in the American Gothic narratives, as Pidot suggests is peculiar to the genre because the wilderness was the shelter of the native Red Indians who were robbed of their inhabitation in the civilizing mission of the white man. Hence, wilderness in the American Gothic genre arouses fear as it is an indication of how the nature is inclined to extract revenge from the white man. To avenge its brutal violation, the wilderness assumes fearful proportions and robs the white man of his civility. The wilderness denotes a space that is not man-made, but as Pidot suggests, in its repercussion is as claustrophobic as the dungeons of early Gothic works. In Seraph, Hurston uses this trope in a minor way in the form of the swamps, which overlooks the house of Jim and Arvay, to suggest the deep recesses of the unconscious mind. As Pidot puts it, wilderness “embodies the unpredictability of nature, the absence of man’s civilizing influence, and the unknown” (Pidot 2). The swamps first come across in the novel when Jim takes Arvay
to see the land, which he has bought in a remarkable negotiation, at a price much cheaper than what it actually is for. Suddenly as Arvay sees the swamps she shudders in horror over the terrifying vastness of the swamps and the darkness it encapsulates. Wilderness, Pidot deems “represent the Gothic “Other”” (Pidot 9), and this is quite true in case of Arvay. Terrified due to her early feelings for Carl Middleton, as she plans to leave Sawley for good, Arvay locates a new center for her anxiety in the swamps. As she first lays her eyes on the swamp, she is repulsed with horror,

I don’t want no parts of that awful place. It’s dark and haunted-looking and too big and too strong to overcome. It’s frightening! Like some big old varmint or something to eat you up (SS 80).

Arvay keeps pressing the idea of the swamp being a terrifying locale and cannot forget about the horror it aroused in her. Rieger aptly says here that the swamp signifies “the morass of Arvay’s psyche and her deep-seated feelings of guilt and shame from her past” (Rieger). This past constantly threatened her peace of mind. For Arvay, in an unconscious manner, the swamp is related to Carl Middleton and Earl, who as per Arvay is the punishment for committing mental adultery with her sister’s husband. It is pertinent that Earl, a signifier of her anxieties, fears and past dies a gruesome death in the swamps itself. John Lowe sees this event as symbolical of Arvay repressing her love for Carl. Sometime after Earl’s death as the swamps are cleared for Jim’s capitalist venture, she feels bereft of her memories with the swamps. Butler aptly sees the clearing of the swamp as distancing from Earl’s memories, yet another act of distancing Arvay from her children.

Arvay’s hysterical fits and spasms, whether real or feigned can also be studied as a sign of Arvay’s repressed sexual desires for her sister’s husband and her reluctance to consider marriage to any Other person. Even after Carl got married to Larraine, Arvay harboured fantasies about him returning to herself. However, as she gradually discovers that her love is undiminished, and that Carl is very much delighted in his marriage, she gets her first fit as she learns of Larraine’s second pregnancy. The fits along with her renunciation of the world for religious duties, establishes her as a queer figure in Sawley. Arvay’s fits also occur quite noticeably and mostly when young suitors accompany her to home and are embarrassed to find Arvay in spasms. Hysterics were most commonly associated with young girls and widows and it was thought that marriage or pregnancy would cure the fits. Shoshana Felman throws light
on the deeper nature of such mentally unstable behaviour as this kind of behaviour suggests that cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, mental illness is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and political castration (Felman 21).

Arvay’s fits can be read as her guilt and resentment over Carl’s marriage with her sister. Also, it can be regarded as her desire to express herself which she cannot considering her introvert nature. Repeatedly, the text hints at the idea that Arvay had a secret life of her own. Such secrets, when not shared with anyone and while living amidst perpetual guilt, subdued anger and various latent desires, can easily lead to such mentally disturbing behaviour. As if a not-so-easily-discouraged-Jim sees through Arvay’s behaviour he cures it at once by dropping a drop of turpentine oil in her eye leading Arvay to at once come to normalcy. Even if her fits are feigned and not real, it does convey the fact that Arvay does not finds an outlet for her emotions and is tied up in her role of young white maiden. Also, she is certainly more refined than other members of her family. Jackson opines that Arvay’s fits can be seen, “as a psychological angst, occasioned by the abjection of her body in the form of excretory anxiety and childbirth” (Jackson). In such a situation, the only way left for Arvay to show her anger and release her pent-up emotions is through her hysterical attacks. Such hysterical behaviour displays what Agusti calls, “difference confronting patriarchal language and economy, asserting itself as Other than what patriarchy has relegated the female to be” (Agusti 37).

The assemblage of all these Gothic tropes substantiates Hurston’s use of Gothicism and consolidates the notion established in the first chapter. From her early to the later novels, portraying the consternation and dread of the American South was a central concern with Hurston. Themes of the female Gothic prevailed and the nation assumed greater importance for Hurston in her later novels. But what remained constant was the thought that slavery so tarnished the Southern land that for the writers of the black descent, portrayal of the South was inextricable from the genre that presented it most appropriately – the African-American Gothic.

NOTES

1. From the poem “The Masque of Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe.