Chapter IV

“Where Dwell The Ghouls”: Short Stories and Drama

Hurston’s short stories are tales of everyday life in the rural American South. Fraught with daily violence, jealousy, marital discords and sexual politics, these stories are a mirror to the rural South, also portrayed in works of William Falkner, Eudora Welty and Joyce Carol Oates. As her novels are the primary means of showcasing the dread associated with the South, the stories also dwell on similar themes. In a microcosm, the stories also reflect the concerns as voiced by Hurston in her novels, be it marital violence, fear of the other, power of capitalism in America and the decadence associated with it, voodoo and hoodoo as sources of fear for the whites etc. In this chapter Hurston’s early writings have been analyzed from the perspective of the Gothic. While some of these stories like “Sweat” and “The Gilded Six-Bits” have received some critical attention, stories like “Black Death” and “Muttsy” are largely devoid of any major scholarly attention. The chapter based on Hurston’s short stories and early writings serve to support the fact that portrayal of the Gothic with relation to the rural black community of the South was not a marginal concern for Hurston. Her short stories substantiate the notion that the presentation of the horrifying side of the rural South was indeed a seminal idea that ran in her works from early to later period of her writing. Tania Modleski’s observation about Gothic literature and its significance for depicting reality is truly mirrored in Hurston’s works, as she asserts that “the Gothic has been used...to connect the social with the psychological, the personal with the political” (qtd. in Punter 319).

The Gothic is also intimately connected with economics as the Gothic focuses on the corruption of the human mind and soul, where greed or avarice is a fundamental vice underlying human corruption. In its American form the Gothic is more deeply connected with money as the American dream is inextricably aligned with economic success championing capitalism. To be precise, the American Gothic deflates the promises and utopian values of white capitalism. In the words of Michael A. Parker, the writers of the Gothic use this narrative mode to lay bare the “thoroughly barbaric economic system” (Parker 28). The inclusion of such an economic system, that is
callous and inconsiderate, is much in synchronization with the human suffering and culture anxieties that Gothic seeks to illustrate. The presence of such an economic system turns sane human beings into monsters. It was in slave narratives that the Gothic intermingled with the realities of the economic system to convey the outrageous evil inherent in the economic benefits to be extracted from the slave system. Thus, the Gothic especially in the American context is closely intertwined with capitalism and consumerism. In a society affected by devastating effects of evil economic practices, a horrendous effect is cast on human relationships as well. Anna Sonser explicates that “[a]s social relations are transformed into a progressive extension of the commodity-form, there emerges a subtext of violence and horror that materializes as the hallmark of Gothic fiction” (Sonser 2). In a society suffering from the ramifications of slavery and the loss of selfhood, being commodified into means of exchange is a pattern that passed as legacy to the offspring of slaves even if they were not slaves themselves. The socio-economics translated into everyday horror and the fear of leading a commodified life. Sonser makes clear that it is not ghosts, goblins and vampires that the Gothic seeks to portray but rather “the essential horror of the Gothic is...its latent power to address the disenchanted world of production and commodification of the social”(Sonser 13). It is not only in the conjuring of the signifiers that the expertise of a Gothic writer lies, but also in the unveiling of the consumerist American culture that threatens and distorts the identity of an individual.

“Black Death” (1921)

Often violence against women is not given its due importance in the works of male writers such as William Faulkner and Richard Wright, eminent writers of the American Gothic. Gothic narratives provide the female writers with a narrative form where they can voice their deepest fears and terrors of female existence in the haunted South. The violence that remains veiled in the works of male writers gets pronounced in the works of female writers such as Hurston and Morrison. It is pertinent to recall how in Beloved, as Paul D constantly focuses on the fact that the School Teacher and the boys hit Sethe, what upsets her more is mammary rape, the stealing of milk from her breasts that was meant for her children. This sensitivity towards female experience of violence is more conspicuous in female writers of the South. Toombs
appropriately says about such male writers that “[t]he violence these male characters fear and flee is foregrounded often graphically – to the complete elision of the men’s illicit activities and violent acts towards women” (Toombs 15). Most often, such narratives as Native Son justify the obliteration of female violence in the name of violence done towards male protagonists. Hurston, says Toombs, represents a kind of violence and horror where racial interests are not foregrounded; rather attention is paid to the issue of horrifying acts of violence done against women. Hence, at the cost of occasionally not projecting racism as the central focus of her works, Hurston chooses to investigate the fears and anxieties of black women in everyday life, how they are powerless in the face of it and how they sometimes retaliate in their own ways.

American gender socialization creates individuals who are domineering on the one hand, and passive on the other, a dichotomy that directly affects how people, particularly men and women communicate and interact with one another (Toombs 66).

It is such discord that Hurston brings to the fore in two of her stories and “Black Death”(1921) and “Sweat”(1926). Both stories narrate the tales of women suffering due to inhumane activities of men – whether husband or lover. At the back of such brutality lies the influence of White materialistic culture that corrupt the black ethos. This corruption has a two-fold effect on the female population as they are doubly marginalized. Helene Meyers opines that

[F]emicidal plots bring the Gothic and the quotidian together; thus the housing project, familiar streets, a park, the home that is not a castle – all harbour potential danger (Meyers 24).

Such bringing together of realism and the Gothic characterize the works of Hurston. Through her works Hurston often problematized heterosexual relationships. And as Strengell opines destructive heterosexual relationships can be seen in terms of adultery and violent and/or dominant relationships (45). It is the effects of such destructive relationships that Hurston wishes to portray in many of her short stories.
“Black Death” is a story in which the wrong done against the female occupies the center stage and the course of action taken to seek revenge, situates the story in the Gothic mode. The story “Black Death” tells the tale of betrayal and revenge in heterosexual relationship within the black community itself. Docia Boger suffers heartbreak at the hands of Beau Didley, once she declares that she is expecting his child. To her worries is added the gossip of the whole town. Didley blights their love as he betrays the innocent Docia, expresses arrogance, and displays the power of money. Docia sees “things for the first time without her tinted glasses and real terror seized her” (205). She turns to her mother, who in turn swears to avenge this treatment of her daughter.

As Patterson analyses, the theme of the narrative is betrayal and revenge, a theme common in Gothic and especially female Gothic literature. Women use violence to save themselves from and avenge themselves for moral violation. This is “also about codes of honour. The honour of a young woman and her family’s honour must be vindicated.” (Patterson 96). Also, it may be observed as Robert Hemenway does, that the story draws from the African heritage. The cultural difference is stressed many times in the story with lines such as, a white man “is a materialistic with little ears for overtones” (“Black Death” 202) or that “white folks are very stupid about some things. They can think mightily but cannot feel” (“Black Death” 202). Hence, here Hurston emphasizes that the forces that rule the white culture are horrendous and cataclysmic for the black Eden. The features that we find as displayed by some characters are

the very elements in the Eatonville culture that are made into stereotypes by an unfeeling, excessively materialistic, hopelessly rational white society (Hemenway 77).

Apathy, materialism, arrogance and being practical rather than emotional or sentimental- all these are qualities are found in the white slave masters portrayed in many slave narratives. Diddley displays these qualities just like the capitalist Joe Starks in Their Eyes Were Watching God, he is a white man in a black body.

As in female Gothic literature, the women in the story derive power to avenge themselves. It is through the use of voodoo to kill Didley who is no different than a white man using Docia as a commodity of consumption. Gothic in the hands of writers who champion the power of women, becomes a tool through which they are
able to transcend the social barriers that confine women to the domestic set-up. Also, a task usually left to the male characters, that of extracting revenge, is entrusted upon females in the story. Margaret Atwood who also infuses in her protagonists the same desire to avenge crimes committed against them postulates that such women in the Gothic fiction,

are not passive zombies, they do as much rescuing as the princes do, though they use magic, perseverance and cleverness rather than cold steel to do it...[they] show considerable wit and resourcefulness and usually win, not just by being pretty virtuous but by using their brains (qtd. in Olson 38).

If in physical power and otherwise in social status, females are subjugated, it is the power of voodoo that becomes the tool for extracting revenge. Realism and the mystery of the Gothic and the occult are mingled together by the author to render a tale of power in the hands of black women against corrupt black males. Also, we see that the writer presents not only the white men but also black men as a threat to female honour and her sexual self. Subverting the texts that make the black woman the center of evil and overtly sexual, Hurston presents the white man in the black body as the intruder and the predator who is countered in his boastfulness about money, power and manhood by black women.

Gothic texts use primitivism and wilderness as a stock setting to erase any distinctions between civilizing forces and savage behavior. It problematizes the behaviour upheld as sophisticated, refined and modern. According to Glendening, inclusion of primitivism also complicates the process of moving towards modernity/civilization, tracing the regression in human civilization towards values of barbarism. The ‘othering’ of certain cultures by western system is fructified in demarcating certain cultures as regressive, barbaric and savage. The story can also said to include what Glendening chooses to call ‘imperial Gothic’. We see how extracting revenge from the upholder of materialistic white values in the story i.e., Diddley, is the aim of black women wronged by him. Hence, the inclusion of such primitive values in a Gothic text also encompasses the fear of the oppressors, who can anytime be attacked by those who are oppressed through the secret power that they possess, seen here in the form of voodoo. On a larger scale, as Arata opines, such anxieties voice the horror in the minds of the powerful as for them such strategies “makes the nation vulnerable
from attack from the vigorous, primitive peoples” (qtd. in Glendening 114). What becomes ambiguous is the status of such usage of power on the moral level. Traditionally in Gothic texts such as Dracula (1897), primitivism is associated with evil. However, here the women use the forces of the primitive to avenge the violence done against them. Thus, what should be regarded as evil - female sexuality seeking revenge, or Diddley’s ways of a civilized white slave master, becomes a matter of question. It is problematizing or complicating the reading of the Gothic that Hurston deserves due credit for. The savagery which was concealed beneath the forces of modernity in any urban setting comes to the fore in the rural black south, proving that the past is never dead and what the Africans left in their homeland can be evoked in times of need, wrecking havoc on a representative of the oppressive values. Edward Taylor opines how the western society divides the whole world neatly into categories of civilized and savage and those who occupy the in-between space. However, the usage of primitivism in “Black Death” unsettles this compartmentalization. We see the forces of primitive Africa right in the American nation - the upholder of the forces of civilization. This primitivism, not banished outside the nation, but flourishing inside it, threatens the capitalist and materialist forces of American nation. Mysterious death is also a feature in Hurston’s famous story “Spunk”, in which the ghost of a cuckolded husband allegedly kills the paramour of his wife. Spunk, the paramour keeps on shouting till the very end that somebody is trying to kill him by thrusting him towards the saw-cutting machine. A black bob-cat is thought to be Joe Kanty’s ghost by Spunk. If Gothic literature is seen to be associated with the supernatural, then “Spunk” was the only story by her in which she actually toys with the idea of there being a ghost.

To seek justice, Mrs. Boger goes to Old Man Morgan, the hoodoo man whose “eyes are reddish and the large gold hoop ear-rings dangling on either side of his shrunken black face make the children shrink in terror” (203). He is known to have sold himself to the devil in return for black cat’s bone for its unmatchable voodoo powers. We can see the traces of the Gothic in the primitive forces pervading Morgan’s dwelling.

As she approached Blue Sink she all but turned back. It was a dark night but the lake shimmered and glowed like phosphorus near the shore...She remembered that folks said Blue Sink the bottomless was Morgan’s graveyard and all Africa awoke in her blood (“Black Death” 206).
The story establishes the image of Morgan in the very beginning with a catalogue describing the various punishments meted out to people due to his hoodoo powers. Be it the “loveless curse”, “paralysis”, “bloody flux”, or the death of a rival Old Lady Grooms—he has done it all. His power is quite striking in its godliness “Life and death are in his hands—he sometimes kills” (203). Terror pervades in the whole ambience in Morgan’s House, whether it is his eerie indifference, which makes him more professional, his reading of Mrs. Boger’s mind or the final revengeful shot taken at Diddley, which kills him. The doctors pronounce his death as “heart failure” but the mystery of it is in the “powder burn directly over the heart” (207). What is threatening to the existence of black values of communal coexistence even in this act of revenge is that commerce is the central power governing human action. Morgan helps Mrs. Boger not because of selfless practice of his powers but because he can have her money. His indifference and apathy towards Mrs. Boger’s predicament shows that her suffering is of no value to him. He does not even wish to hear her woeful tale, but chooses to launch towards the action directly that would give him money. We also see that the rational behaviour of Diddley is countered by voodoo, which could be seen as superstitious by western pragmatism. Hence, superstition or mysticism permeates reality to lead to horrendous repercussions for Diddley.

Several black writers of the South, especially slave writers, hint at the absence of justice for the blacks in the South. In such case, the question that who would deliver justice to the wronged women in the southern states of America becomes pertinent. Trudier Harris writes in her study *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African-American Writers and the South*,

> In the macro-arena, the fear of the Mason-Dixon line is located specifically in the courthouses of the South...the fear of the absence of justice finds its way into the folklore as well as the literature that African-Americans produce. (Harris 12)

The tale reveals how justice denied results in evoking the power of ancient homelands for the blacks. Hurston’s texts are largely intertextual, and the story about Diddley’s killing by a voodoo doctor also occurs in the story “Uncle Monday” where the daughter of the wronged mother says that she does not wish to go to the sheriff but would rather take care of the matter herself. She chooses to go to the voodoo doctor.
instead of seeking legal course of action. This behavior, while bespeaks of belief in
her ancient faith, it also sheds light on the lack of trust that African-Americans
harboured towards the legal system in America. The horror associated with the South
is largely associated with the lack of legal assistance in the face of gruesome crimes
committed against the blacks. Slavery and possession of slaves was not outlawed by
the legal system till the Emancipation Proclamation was passed. Even after it was
done, Jim Crow laws ensured that blacks live only for the service of whites and not as
rightful American citizens. Eric J. Sundquist appropriately calls the Jim Crow laws as
“the canon of bestiality” (Sundquist 22). The Jim Crow laws were formed to execute
segregation of public transportation, schools, churches, public libraries, theatres,
hotels, restaurants etc. so that blacks do not think themselves as privileged as the
whites. Some extremely racist government officials ensured that the blacks never
forget their servile positions in the American nation. W. K. Vardaman was a white
governor in the South who was immensely popular for his racist policies. For him
“the way to control the nigger is to whip him when he does not obey without it, and
another is never to pay him more wages than it is actually necessary to buy food and
clothing” (qtd. in Levine). Another American Senator Theodore Gilmore Bilbo held
that “the nigger is only 150 years from the jungles of Africa where he cut he some
fresh steak for breakfast” (qtd. in Levine). In his very suggestive analysis of the Jim
Crow laws as a total institution, Thompson-Miller reveals the bondage, coerciveness,
entrapment which constitute the stock features of total institutions such as mental
hospitals, prisons and army barracks, not to forget the concentration camps, which
represented the zenith of total institutions. As Thompson-Miller opines, “The use of
racial violence in Jim Crow’s total institution led to an overwhelming sense of fear
that ultimately controlled every aspect of African American’s lives” (Thompson-
Miller 21). Especially the horror associated with laws not being there for the aid of
those who were lynched or hanged to the trees. Terrorist and white supremacist
organizations such as the Ku Klux clan did not tolerate any endeavours of the blacks
to assert their citizenship in the country. In novels such as Richard Wright’s Native
Son, it is seen how black writers expressed their protest against the legal and judicial
system in the South. While this fact may be subtly hinted at in the present text, it’s
immense significance cannot be overlooked in making South the land of perturbation
it was known to be.
“Sweat” (1926)

Gothic narratives focus on the issues of desire, sinful sexual behavior and the subversion of ideal institutions such as marriage. Susan Y. Najita, in fact claims that adultery and incest suggest an inclination towards primitivism, “this primitivism is central to the uncanny, the Gothic itself relying upon “civilized” prohibition of incest and adultery” (Najita 41). The roots of adultery among the African-Americans also lay in slavery. Slave owners constantly separated husbands and wives, with loyalty not getting in the way of sexual relationships. However, a carrying forward of such behavior implies decadence and degeneration in the familial structure of a community on its way towards better living and progress. In the story “Sweat”, Hurston chooses to use the economics in the South to reflect on the oppression and sexual politics in heterosexual relationships. Money affected the equations of men and women as,

Unemployment haunted the men who worked in the citrus industry. Almost all of the women worked steadily as domestics, and their comparative economic independence certainly contributed to men’s insecurities and shaped the pattern of relations between the sexes (Patterson 110).

The inferiority complex of an unemployed man is the cause of the violence in the home in Hurston’s celebrated story “Sweat”. Hurston shows the marital bed literally and metaphorically abused by forces of materialism, tyranny, and maliciousness. Delia is in an abusive marital relationship and we witness this in her husband’s malicious prank when he places a whip which Delia mistakes as a snake only to terrorize her. Terror- whether of snakes or of her husband’s malicious intentions- is all-pervading in the story. Sykes cannot withstand Delia’s financial independence and while he repeatedly tells her to keep “white folks’ clothes outa dis house.” (74), it is he himself who brings alien forces of jealousy, maliciousness, violence and cruelty to their house. This turns their house into a haunted one. Delia reflects on the pitiful condition of their marriage because Sykes brought into their marriage the forces of alienation, malignancy and disloyalty,

She lay awake, gazing upon the debris that cluttered their matrimonial trail...Anything like flowers had long ago been drowned in the salty stream that had been pressed from her heart. Her tears, her sweat, her blood. She had
brought love to the union and he had brought a longing after the flesh. ("Sweat" 75).

Love entirely fades away from their marriage in the very beginning due to Sykes’ brutal and philandering ways. No wonder, the beautiful Delia turned into a hardened woman with “knotty, muscled limbs, her harsh knuckled hands”, as it was “[t]oo late to hope for love.”(76). The poetics and politics of commodification and consumerism is clearly reflected in the treatment of Sykes who uses her exactly like the men discuss on the porch -like sugarcane,

Dey squeeze an’ grind, squeeze an’ grind an’ wring every drop uh pleasure dat’s dey is wrun dry, dey treats ’em jes lak dey do a cane-chew. Dey throws ’em away (“Sweat” 78).

Delia could attain no reconciliation, as it was clear “that the breaches must remain agape” (79). However, Delia has since long stopped relying on Sykes for any emotional companionship and his repeated derogatory behaviour has aroused hatred in Delia’s heart. One day she is tested to the extreme with Sykes trying to terrorize her with a rope in dark that looked like a snake. This is when she tells him about her feelings for him for the first time,

Ah hates yuh, Sykes...Ah hates yuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh. Ah done took and took till mah belly is full up tuh mah neck. Ah hates yuh lak uh suck-egg dog (81).

As Cheryl A. Wall opines, “The calm with which Delia pronounces her hatred is more sinister than the invective itself” (Wall 11). Kathryn Lee Seidel in her analysis of “Sweat” observes the story as a continuation of slavery and hence this can be seen as another link in the terrifying past of America. In Hurston’s works this is how the family becomes a prototype for the whole nation. Just as slavery flourished for personal gain at the cost of the individual, Delia labours hard to provide Sykes all that he requires. Delia’s labour provides him money so that he can enjoy more commodities. Sykes lives off the money earned by Delia, and regards her property and her body as his own, to be possessed and dispossessed, to be modified or kept as it is, according to his own wishes.

The only way in which Sykes reinforces his status as the man of the house is by threatening Delia repeatedly, first verbally, jokingly and then practically by bringing a
snake into their house. The terror in the house became all too pronounced for Delia, once Sykes brings a rattlesnake to drive Delia out of the house, so that he could bring his mistress in. Divine justice is obtained once the same snake kills Sykes himself and as he is killed, Sykes utters a voice of inhumane agony. Much in the tradition of a Gothic tale, Sykes’ inhumane behavior is reflected in his shriek that sounded like that of an animal,

Outside Delia heard a cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man possibly could express, without a recognizable human sound...another series of animal screams, the intermittent whirl of the reptile. The shade torn violently down from the window, letting in the red dawn, a huge brown hand seizing the window stick, great dull blows upon the wooden floor punctuating the gibberish sound long after the rattle of the snake had abruptly subsided...it made her ill (“Sweat” 85).

Hemenway opines that Sykes can be seen as the devil himself “whose demoniac desires eventually lead to a struggle for Delia’s life and soul” (Hemenway 72).

This situation at the end of the story problematizes the ending of the tale as most Gothic narratives do. A matter of concern is that at the end of the story, in the manner of a female Gothic tale, Delia is able to extract revenge from Sykes, but her soul is in jeopardy. Sykes dies, but Delia does not makes any efforts to warn or save Sykes, and as Cheryl Wall asserts, “she exacts her revenge, but at a terrible spiritual cost” (Wall 12). Coming straight from a “love feast” in the church, when Sykes calls out for Delia’s help, she is unable to extend her hand to the dying Sykes. She deliberately shows herself to Sykes so that he realizes that she is not unavailable for help, but unwilling to help. Delia, till now in a morally unambiguous zone of absolute goodness against the absolute evil that Sykes represented, now enters the ambiguous realm of “spiritual peril” (Wall 11). Wall draws attention towards a spiritual that Delia sings in the story and which resonates during the course of the whole moral story,

Jurden water, black an’ col’
Chills de body, not de soul
An’ Ah wantah cross Jordan in uh calm time

(“Sweat” 82)
Wall questions as to “how will Delia, good Christian though she has tried to be, ever cross Jordan in a calm time?” (Wall 12-13).

Also, her house, her garden and the warmth in her house, invokes a sense of survival through it all as “Hurston presents Delia’s portion of Eden/Eatonville as a female created place, ordered and beautiful because of the efforts of a woman” (Seidel 176). It is the defilement of this Eden, which Sykes corrupts with the snake that he brings and with his own malicious behavior, which Hurston wants to convey through the story. It is noticeable that they do not have any children and the only thing Delia creates out of her “sweat” is the white, clean laundry. And Sykes - the serpent in the house, threatens to destroy the whole laundry first and then the house. It is Sykes’ attack on the laundry created out of her body that Delia is finally moved to seek revenge, if not consciously then unconsciously, till an opportunity arises itself. Seidel holds, “In placing the snake in the laundry, Sykes has violated Delia’s creation; he has disordered her house and finally actually intends to take her life” (Seidel 180). In the story, we witness the theme carried forward in the novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison – “the theme of the thwarted female artist figures...” (McDowell 31). Whether it is the garden or the laundry or her spiritual advancement, Sykes has the potency to defile her art,

The final joke on Sykes is that his obsession with male, phallic power, and the way he misuses it in his marriage, finally kills him, in a doubly figurative and dreadfully comic way (Lowe 186).

The very marriage bed that he defiles is the site of horror and terror for himself. Also, the house, which he haunted with his lust and malice, becomes the site of his death. Sykes corruption can be traced back to the traces of slavery in the black way of living. The townsman discuss how Sykes is always arrogant, expects great things, but does nothing. Especially ever since some woman from the North taught him how to drive, he has been unbearable due to his superiority complex. Siedel even compares their marriage to slavery where Sykes is sustained by doing nothing, making him “the slaveholder” (Seidel 173). Quema explicates that

Gothic...has to do with the barbaric...it is a matter of looking at the pressures which turn us into barbarians in relation precisely to the society and the body in which we were born (qtd. in Quema 115).
This barbarism is embodied by Sykes who displays the defilement of black values and manifests the signs of a capitalist slave-owner. For sixteen years of marriage, his brutality and maliciousness pervades the household, through which he controls Delia. Hence, Delia’s story is a horrifying one similar to that of a slave. The story ends with Sykes death and Delia’s revenge. The irony that accompanies the ending is that Delia was rarely happy when Sykes lived, and when he died he possibly claimed her soul as well.

“MUTTSY” (1926)

Published in 1926 during the Prohibition era, “Muttsy” is a Gothic tale that focuses on a young girl being lost in labyrinths of Harlem. In this story, Hurston follows the tropes used in classic Gothic texts, such as *The Monk* (1796). The setting employed by Hurston in the story is that of a buffet flat, a retreat for men and women to indulge in drinking, dancing and sexually promiscuous acts in a comfortable setting provided by Ma Turner. The house comes across as a Gothic castle with sexual adventures of many people constituting its existence and everyday life. If, for a maiden of the early Gothic works the convent held great terror for its confining intense austerity, this house of pleasure was no less terrifying. Ma Turner in her urban pleasure-house is the gatekeeper of this castle who facilitates the entry of people, but they cannot stop coming to this place once they are used to the license for promiscuous activities that it provides. Not incongruently, Pinkie in her very first meeting dislikes Ma and notices “her smile resembled the smile of the Wolf in Red Riding Hood” (42). An allusion to a classic Gothic story helps the reader to quickly realize that this story is not different from “Little Red Riding Hood”. Ellen Moers portrays a picture of a Gothic heroine that quite matches with Pinkie’s portrayal in the story.

The Gothic heroine was quintessentially a defenseless victim, a weakling, a whimpering, trembling, cowering little piece of propriety whose sufferings are the source of her erotic fascination...Stability and integrity are indeed the major resources of the Radcliffe heroine; her sensibility and her decorum never falter (Moers).

As she gets acquainted more and more with the house she has come to live in, she “wished herself back home again even with the ill treatment and squalor” (45). Her nervous temperament is reflected in the ready-to-cry state, which she is reduced to as the guests in the house tease her. She is a country girl who is disgusted to realize that Ma drinks. As she “smelt the liquor on Ma’s breath and felt contaminated at her

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touch” (45). She feels that it is improper for Ma to put on make-up and most importantly like a true Gothic heroine is determined about Muttsy that “He ain’t goin’ to make me none of his women – I’ll die first” (54). Also, like most Gothic heroines, Pinkie is on the edges of class hierarchy. Throughout the story the reader finds Pinkie constantly thinking of her powerlessness in terms of money and being finicky about finances. She is neither a rich woman, nor a prostitute, but a girl from the countryside with strict morals and no means to tackle the attention she receives from the men of working class. Each night she wishes to ward off the advances of men, Muttsy in particular, and behaves in a timid, edgy and anxious fashion, choosing to go to bed early rather than face the riotous crowd. Quite like a predictable Gothic heroine her virginity is the bone of contention in the text. Her terrors are of sexual nature. Ma uses the beautiful Pinkie to lure men into her residence and parasitically feeds on her lucrativeness for the place. The claustrophobia that Pinkie, the protagonist, feels in the house is evidence enough to establish the overwhelming sense of passivity and encaged state that it brings for her. Day after day, Pinkie watches the same people coming everyday, indulging in a life of pleasure seeking and it alienates her from the whole set-up. Her stay in the house is motivated by her lack of finance and she feels absolutely helpless to change her conditions. She

felt shut in, imprisoned, walled in these women who talked of nothing but men and numbers and drink, and men who talked of nothing but the numbers and drink and women. And desperation took her. (“Muttsy” 51)

Eugenia DeLamotte in her study of nineteenth century Gothic explicates the mental set up of a Gothic heroine in a Gothic castle, a situation that is suggestive of Pinkie’s desperate nervousness as well.

Vice, violence, danger, death—the abstract nature of the terms is significant. So is the vague premonition, the indefinable feeling of dread that possesses the heroine as she crosses the threshold of the castle...At the threshold, the heroine does not speculate on the intentions of the person who brought her there; rather, she responds to the atmosphere of his house (DeLamotte 16).

Thus, insurmountable terror stems from not understanding the cause of threat and fear. This abstraction lies beneath all the confusion and anxiety that Pinkie feels in the house of Ma turner, which can be linked here to corruption and decadence. Pinkie’s fears, if attempted to be concretized, could be said to result from her anxieties concerning her sexuality and the fear of its awakening in the presence of this house
that is inevitably associated with loss of innocence. Her foray into the urban world makes her categorize Ma Turner and all other prostitutes as the Other. The boundary that separates her from all the ‘other’ women is of utmost importance to her. As the issue of boundaries between the self and the other is of immense importance to Gothic literature, the text can be said to pronounce those fears that characterized the young maiden of the classic Gothic works.

To add to her horror comes her seducer, the handsome ladies’ man- Muttsy, a gambler. Pinkie’s position is that of a young virgin about to be seduced by a man of the world. Muttsy in the guise of helping her begins his game of seduction, but Pinkie senses his intentions and foils his plans, till he shows to her that he is hopelessly in love with her. Muttsy steals into Pinkie’s chamber at night just as DeLamotte points out, Schedoni does in Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797). Starting to show his love to an unconscious Pinkie, what stops Muttsy in the middle of it all is Pinkie’s innocence, and the strength of her morals. This scene also has its parallels in many early Gothic works where the only means of self-defense available to the heroine is her power of virtue. Speaking of Richardson’s *Clarissa*, DeLamotte writes

> She maintains her separateness through a vigilant consciousness of her worth and his moral inferiority—a consciousness so strong that Lovelace himself quails, again and again, before a sense of her inviolable otherness. In the last emergency the heroine’s only defense is to make the villain perceive so vividly the spiritual barrier between him and her that he will be abashed into maintaining a physical distance as well (De Lamotte 32).

He realizes that the only way she could be his if he honourably marries her. His game of seduction so entraps her that Muttsy in the guise of marrying her actually treats her not unlike other women he used and got rid of. When he learns that his money making through gambling is the cause of her coldness towards him, he takes a job but senses a month after marriage that he cannot keep away from gambling. The story is open-ended but Muttsy’s assertion at the end that “What man can’t keep one li’l wife an’ two li’l bones?” is not a good sign. It hints at a terrible fate for Pinkie, who is absolutely unaware of Muttsy’s duplicitous nature and all his experience of the world and its evil ways before she even met him.

Hurston denies the reassurance that comes in most classic Gothic tales by the marriage of the Gothic maiden with a man of noble character in the present story.
lending to it a darker mood. There is also a sign that the husband who rescued her from her decadent castle is ominously the perpetrator of the same legacy. She is indeed a Gothic heroine who first runs away from the seducer, who can have her only through marrying her and is subjected to the horror of marital Gothic once she is married to him. DeLamotte explicates

the hero who rescues the young woman and takes her away to live happily ever after may really be the villain who captures her and takes her away to live unhappily in a situation of confinement, sexual domination, and economic exploitation (DeLamotte 159).

Pinkie is caught in a similar marriage where Muttsy rescues Pinkie from the sexually degraded Gothic castle of Ma Turner’s house but traps her in a marriage which threatens her life and her future. It suggests that the suffering of the Gothic heroine did not stop rather, by all means it shows sign of continuation. The hero and the villain are one and the same here and this fusing together imparts to the text a more horrifying effect also lending the impact of the modern Gothic to the story along with its classic version.

The debasement associated with the fulfillment of the American Dream is deflated repeatedly in the works of American Gothic, and this is precisely what the story does. It is significant here that how money comes to play a significant role in urban decadence and squalor that is so strongly present in the story. And this in turn results from the culture of capitalism championed in the American ethos. Social decadence is inextricably related with moral debasement in works such as The Great Gatsby (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ma Turner’s trade stems from lack of any means of earning and lack of any financial help from her husband. Pinkie’s helplessness and her entrapment in Ma’s house does not comes from her sense of decorum that we find in the Gothic heroines in early Gothic works, rather it arises from her lack of income. For women like Ada, Muttsy’s disillusioned ex-girlfriend, prostitution in such parties provided women the opportunity to land rich husbands for themselves.

Women came in by ones or twos, some in shabby coats turned up about the ears, and with various cheap but showy hats crushed down over unkempt hair. More men, more women, more trips to the kitchen with loud laughter (“Muttsy” 45).
The game of gambling that reveals Muttsy’s true nature towards the end of the story and is a sign of moral depravity in its very essential nature, is also centered on money. Ma Turner’s husband also wishes to “edgecate” her in the ways of their urban house of false glitter and glamour, suggesting initiation of Pinkie into a libertine world of Ma Turner’s. All this indicates towards the rut that commercialism makes their house to be. Vices and base activities that makes the house of Jay Gatsby a house of false values and hollow recreation are also to be found in “Muttsy” as well. This quality punctures the idea of American dream based on the acquisition of wealth. The characters who make money in the story are Ma Turner, Muttsy and probably the prostitutes, all of whom indulge in immoral activities. Lack of wealth is associated with Pinkie who actually tries her best to keep her moral standards high.

“THE GILDED SIX-BITS” (1933)

The Gilded Six-Bits is a tale of the desecrating forces of materialism, greed and desire that leads to the presence of alienation and isolation in a marriage. Lena Wangren analyses how capitalism can well be compared to being a monster and vampire. She throws light on how Marx himself many times described capitalism in Gothic terms. In Grundrisse (1857), Marx describes how

Capital posits the permanence of value (to a certain degree) by incarnating itself in fleeting commodities and taking on their form, but at the same time changing them just as constantly; alternates between its eternal form in money and its passing form in commodities; … But capital obtains this ability only by constantly sucking in living labour as its soul, vampire-like (qtd. in Wangren).

Judith Halberstam also notices this alignment to point out that Marx’s description is Gothic indeed because it throws light on how “to transfer matter into commodity, commodity into value and value into capitalism” (103). Capitalism is said to live more parasitically on the labour of the working class. Also, consumerism was regarded, Michaud indicates, as a great threat to masculine identity. Michaud cites Herbert Marcuse who points out how the American people were passive consumers and this mass-consumption had reduced America to the glitter and glamour of Hollywood and billboards. To acquire more and more and to be able to possess is the impetus that drives Missie May to Otis in “The Gilded Six-Bits”. Amongst the benevolent bucolic world, jealousy, ambition and competition constituted a corruption of hitherto existing
idyllic values. Mercy Otis Warren, cited by Michaud opines that ambition and greed are the reasons of destruction and ruin that mar the face of the earth. On a larger scale, the threat in front of Joe and Missie are the ones that plagued the American nation. This was the threat of the American republic, Michaud suggests, being polluted by greed and incessant competition. Leo Marx in his *The Machines in the Garden*, insisted that America has always been a nation which carries forward the image of a pastoral set-up in its theory of an ideal society. Hence, no wonder that when Hurston chose to show the effect of corrupt and materialistic forces, the setting that she chose was pastoral, a small town community. Such a community represented the unconscious image in the minds of all Americans and acquired an archetypal dimension when attacked by material forces or in case of depiction of any other menace that endangered the nation. Moreover, the impact of corrupt forces increases several folds, when they are depicted in such a setting.

All is idyllic between Missie May and Joe Banks until the force of materialism enters the household in the form of discussion about Ottis D. Slemmons, a newcomer in the town, famous for his winsome ways and chunks of gold that he wears. Lowe draws attention towards the two metaphors, which are sweetness and money. The story starts with emblems of love such as candies, chewing gum, sweet soap, pudding, ice-cream, sugar and in the middle of story there are references to silver, gold, dollars and bits, signifying the materialism of U.S. industry. As they indulge in love game it “reflects a naïveté about economic and society for which both will suffer” (Wall 15). We see how Otis, representing white values of arrogance and greed, absently motivates Joe to become like himself. The scene where Joe imitates Slemmons is comic in nature, but it has an alarming foreboding function. Joe tries to be like Slemmons and it is significant how even before Slemmons has actually entered their house, he enters through Joe to corrupt the marital bed.

As they return from Otis’ ice-cream parlour, though Missie May praises Joe, yet she appears visibly smitten with all the gold Otis wears- the next sign that alien material forces are about to infest the house. Ironically, just as “everything was right”, we see the force of the uncanny striking at the root of their marriage. As, Lowe opines, “it seems the acid supply at the fertilizer plant has run out, but an abundance of acidic marital bitterness awaits him at home”(Lowe 189). Avery Gordon defines haunting as a moment in which “that which appears not to be there”, becomes, “a seething presence.”(qtd. in Yaegar 99). The uncanniness lies in the very fact that Missie May
commits adultery when Joe is very secure and assured about their relationship. This also makes her corruption all too pronounced.

As Joe discovers shockingly that his wife has committed adultery,

The great belt on the wheel of Time slipped and eternity stood still. By the match light he could see the man’s legs fighting with his breeches in his frantic desire to get them on. He had both chance and time to kill the intruder in his helpless condition…but he was too weak to take action. (GB 93)

As he talks to a weeping Missie May, he learns that she has “fallen” for his gold money. Joe manages to catch hold of a bit of gold piece, which Slemmons wore, before he flees out of their house. Wall opines that the chain that is still attached to the coin can be seen as a metaphor of slavery, which symbolized, “the ultimate commodification of human beings and disfigurement of relationships”(Wall 15), reiterating Hurston’s commitment towards representation of her political concerns. After the idyll is disrupted,

There were no more Saturday romps. No ringing silver dollars…no pockets to rifle. In fact the yellow coin in his trousers was like a monster hiding in the cave of his pockets to destroy him (GB 95).

Missie May assumes the same position of a wife only when she brings forth another male from her womb. It starts with an account of the undefiled Edenic household of Joe and Missie May. At the onset we are told about the pastoral setting with “honey flowers”, “sunshine”, “fresh newspaper” followed by sensuous description of Missie May’s beauty and the love, which they share. He brings for her “candy kisses”, “chewing gum”, “sweet soap” and “pocket handkerchief”, which she takes away from him in a loving, playful manner. However, these means of sweetness are also to be bought by money and to be purchased from the white store owner.

Slemmons (as the name sounds similar to the word serpent) is the effect of debauchery and depravity in Missie’s and Joe’s marriage. His gold teeth, the fangs of avarice and greed that suck love out of Missie and Joe’s marriage, prove Otis’ vampire-like presence. The awe and the admiration that the couple shows in their dialogue about Otis and his riches foreshadow the corrupt act that soon follows in Missie’s adultery. Lowe opines that “Slemmons, who represents the corruption of folk
values by a sojourn in the materialistic North has lost his ability to truly “see” his own people, as he has acquired the con artist’s values” (Lowe 191). This presence of Slemmons as the con artist and the seducer also voices a stock theme of the Gothic, i.e., the difference between appearance and reality. The genre is intensely preoccupied with revealing the corruption and decadence beneath civilized lives. Texts such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* make this struggle between appearance and reality the focal point of the narrative. Beneath all the playfulness and normalcy of love and affection, there lurks the force of greed in Missie. Joe makes clear to Missie that he is as much in awe of Otis’ gold bits as she is, but he has no means to furnish her the same. This dissatisfaction goads her in committing adultery with Otis.

Also seen from the perspective of the female Gothic, the story and its twists imply female sexuality gone out of bounds for the patriarchal culture. This threatens the setup of the ideal American family and refutes the notion of a ‘pure’ and chaste wife. As Missie May tries to exercise her sexuality outside the institution of marriage, she is thrown out of the values that the institution implicitly endorses, and is relegated to the zone of the abject. This is evident in the gilded half-dollar that her husband leaves at her pillow as a payment for the pleasure given to him after she commits adultery. This treatment of hers like a prostitute who is paid by Joe for both sexual encounters situates her in a morally ambiguous zone inhabited not by wives but by whores. Her inclusion into the world of filial and moral values is reconfirmed only after she gives birth to a male child who resembles Joe and not Otis. The female will in the story is denied a free exercise of her sexuality as Missie is bound within the values of the ideal family. This complicates and problematizes the ending of the story.

Jones in his explication over what constitutes the Gothic and what does not, points out towards a pertinent idea. He suggests that rather than the whole experience of horror or terror provided by a text, it is the presence of tropes/s that make a text Gothic. For this revision in Gothic studies he gives the credit to Sandra Gilbert and Gubar who find the Gothic where overtly such experience is not present. This also reveals the Gothic as a form that is not escapist but that which pertains to the issues of the real world. Clarifying on this particular idea of the banal acquiring Gothic dimensions, Emily Jane Cohen postulates the house as a Gothic setting.

Whether we accept the transhistorical terms of Freudian psychoanalysis so often used to account for the Gothic, the *Unheimlich*, or uncanny, tends to
revolve around the hearth... infernal images routinely pervert the ideal of domestic bliss (qtd. in Jones 26).

She further elucidates that the home lost its sacred status and the wives were only to be seen as commodities, as the home increasingly became linked with forces of commercialism. As Wall notices, “[t]he lure of materialism has alienated Joe and Missy May from each other and from themselves” (Wall 15). This culture of women treated as commodities can be seen as being inherited from the times of slavery. The story thus has its antecedent in all slave narratives where women are to be sold on the auction blocks.

“Uncle Monday” (1934)

Focusing on issues very close to African American belief system, the story “Uncle Monday” centers on the figure an old voodoo doctor who plays a strong part in the culminating action of “Black Death” but occupies less space in the narrative. Her fascination with the topic of voodoo probably compelled her to dedicate whole story to this intriguing figure of a voodoo doctor. The figure of a magician or necromancer in early Gothic works, has here been given a new turn by Hurston, who makes the magician or necromancer a black voodoo doctor. The figure of the magician who evoked dark forces in Gothic works largely contradicts the Enlightenment philosophy against which the Gothic literature first emerged. As Allan Lloyd Smith postulates, such inclusion of magic and voodoo is “an acknowledgement of the continuing existence of magic, religious and demonic forces within a more and more secular society” (Smith 7). What heightens the mysterious nature of the story is the Uncle Monday’s nature of living, his unknown appearance in the black community, his immense voodoo powers and his undisclosed life. Magic, occult and the Gothic have been linked since early Gothic texts. Specifically talking about the South, in the subgenre called Southern Gothic, as Don D’Ammassa suggests that, “existence of ghosts, monsters and black magic comes as no surprise to the characters” (Olson 172) in a novel about the South. An inclusion of the magic performed by African-Americans in manifesting the fear associated with the South was a clear choice made by Hurston to show a different aspect of the blacks, the empowerment which they had and could exercise against the whites in the face of all the torments the blacks were subjected to. The horror that she presented through her descriptions of voodoo and hoodoo manifested a hidden life of the blacks that mystified their lives and presented them in the position of those who had the capacity to affect lives – positively as well.
as negatively. Uncle Monday’s such power is most noticeably present in an incident when one of the women in the village community sees the old voodoo doctor writhing in pain, suffering from mutilation of his hand.

The noise she heard was being made by Uncle Monday. He was lying on a pallet of pine straw in such agony that his eyes were glazed over. His right arm was horribly mangled. In fact, it was all but torn away from right below the elbow. The side of his face was horribly torn too (“Uncle Monday” 109).

The villagers came soon, but he was not to be found anywhere for a month. The gossip that travelled around the town after his reappearance in the village after this incident was that he actually a man who could “shed any injured member of his body and grow a new one in its place…when he reappeared his right hand and arm bore no scars”(109). To add to the horror of his very existence was the doubt whether he was a living man or a ghost or a monster. He is known to have once said in a really low voice “I have been dead for many a year. I have come back from where you are going (110). This mysterious nature of his unrevealed being is something that brings in the note of the unknown and the uncanny in the story.

Uncle Monday’s aura and his acts also evoke the quality of the sublime, a key feature of many Gothic works. There is a sense of both dread and awe and fascination associated with his deeds. Though the term has been defined by many critics and intellectuals since ages immemorial, the definition of sublime that is particularly useful in case of Gothic literature is the one given by Edmund Burke, who defines sublime as “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in any manner conversant about terror, is a source of the sublime” (Burke 39).

Many stories about his voodoo powers were spread far and wide. Most prominent according to the narrator being the curse on Mary Ella who cannot keep a husband for more than twenty-eight days, even after fifteen years have passed and she has been married four times with eight children. Another testimony to his voodoo prowess is the downfall of Ant Judy Bickerstaff, a woman voodoo doctor who provoked him by saying that she could reverse all his magic. Once as she went fishing she felt

a threatening, powerful evil all around her…something terrific struck her and she fell into the water…she could not use her legs…Suddenly a bar of red light fell across the lake from one side to the other…Then she saw Uncle Monday walking across the lake to her along this flaming path. On the either
side of the red road swam thousands of alligators, like an army behind its general... The lake is nearly a mile wide, but Ant Judy says Uncle Monday crossed it in less than a minute and stood over her (“Uncle Monday” 115).

According to Ant Judy he threatened her to acknowledge him as her master. She never regained full use of her legs thereafter and stopped practicing voodoo altogether. The villagers associated Uncle Monday with the alligator in the Lake and stood at a respectful distance thereafter. The story brings to the fore the fear of the peripheries – both occult and animalism. Many of Hurston’s contemporary critics accused her of presenting exoticism or primitivism to cash upon the same qualities of African roots, but it seems that it was the fear associated with those on the margins, quite noticeable in the Americans after the Haitian Revolution, that Hurston wished to draw attention to. Uncle Monday also tells the story of those exist on the margins of the marginalized. Such are the people (voodoo doctors) who are feared even by those who constitute the source of threat (the blacks) for the ones occupying the center (the whites). Hence, in pronouncing the fear of those on the edges of the society, the story can well be called a Gothic one. The fear of the dead having risen again, the mystery of the unknown, metamorphosis of human into animals and vice-versa - the story uses these stock Gothic themes, to add to Hurston’s portrayal of the horrifying South. In their attempt to economically benefit from slaves, the whites unknowingly also invited unwanted inheritance in the form of practices such as voodoo, indicating that the fact of colonization is also accompanied by some undue repercussions, which the white man-hard as he may try- cannot do away with. Dealing with and evoking such ambivalence (for the victimizers) about oppression, violence towards the marginalized and the process of ‘civilization’ is one of the chief concerns of Gothic literature.

**Color Struck (1925)**

Hurston’s participates in the existing discourse about slavery and its after-effects by fusing the Gothic and realism. This implies that the lives of the rural folk in the American South are not short of horrifying realities. Hurston draws attention towards one such reality of the South in her play *Color Struck*. Hurston in this play deals with the demons of the pathologized mind that is afflicted due to the ravaging effects of the white gaze. As if creating divisions between the blacks and the whites was not enough to wreck havoc on the minds and bodies of the blacks, the whites did not stop till they
created dissensions within the blacks themselves. This influence of the center is what
determined the mental makeup of the black population in America. Though this center
is unreal, it have tremendous capacity to influence the mind and the actions of an
individual. By creating a Gothic Other within their own community, the blacks let the
corruption of the white values permeate the roots of their own fraternity. The evil of
colourism derives its origin from the white gaze, where an individual’s identity is
determined by how dark or how light he/she is. Judith Halberstam notices how racism
in early Gothic literature was born out of fascination for those who populated the far-
off lands. However, it vilified those who coloured people who lived closer home and
labeled them as the Other.

The play is also a noticeable Gothic work as the writer uses the form of the Anglo-
American Gothic to narrate her stories. A narrative of subversion, the play targets
both blacks and whites simultaneously as the corrupting and degenerating effects of
slavery eventually affects the solidarity of the blacks as well. The canker of slavery
that plagued the American nation assumed another dimension though the practice of
colourism. Konzett rightly opines that Hurston’s works are “symptomatic of a
nation’s pathological racial ideology displaced onto black culture” (Konzett 74). This
pathological condition is a part of Hurston’s works from the very start and this can be
proved by her concerns in the play Color Struck. The play also evinces the fact that
Hurston’s works were not bereft of political leanings as the “African-American
Gothic is not merely literary work, but historicizing political criticism that seeks to lift
the veil of identity” (Borst 26). Fleetwood observes that all along the history of
slavery and especially during the antebellum and the postbellum period, we see
various categories of blacks and ethnic groups having diverse equations with the
white landowners, due to their skin colour. It is this judgmental approach towards
varied skin colours that places whites at one extreme of the colour line and the blacks
at the other, while fostering racism and colourism. Fleetwood opines

The terror of colourism as a visual regime is rooted in the history of white rape
and torture of black bodies and a larger racial structure of subjugating blacks
as cheap and replaceable laboring bodies (75).

Thus, one who was black was termed as the demoniac Other. Especially the black
woman was at a great disadvantage because rapes of such women were not seen as a
result of depravity of the slave masters, but as a consequence of the promiscuity of black women. They were the harbingers of a mixed race that was undesirable and uncared for. Hence, the black woman happened to be the scapegoat for everyone – the white man, the black man and the white woman. This relegation to the zone of the Other was intensified by the importance given to light coloured black women as compared to the darker ones. Light black or brown women were considered to be in an advantageous condition in every realm of life – whether personal or professional. Black women, on the other hand were regarded as the source of fears and depravity such as syphilophobia.

The notion of colourism is also associated with the Gothic because a favourite field of exploration for the Gothic writers is the struggle between the good and the evil. Since ages immemorial, blackness had been associated with diabolism. That which was dark was the opposite of illumination, grace and knowledge. Blackness was synonymous with rawness, wildness, sensuality and evil. All these attributes of darkness had the potency to effect virtue and the goodness of human heart. Brakke mentions how in one of the early Christian scriptures, One Thessalonian, the followers of Paul are instructed and told that they are “all children of light and children of day; we are not of the night or of darkness (qtd. in Brakke 502). Seen in the light of how most writers of the early Gothic have used blackness in their works, it can said that this use was most unfortunate, for it branded the black race as villains once and for all. The whites built the American nation on this conception by annihilating the Native Americans and by enslaving the blacks after uprooting them from their motherland. Toni Morrison opines in her path breaking work Playing in the Dark,

Africanist is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable, not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, bit a progressive fulfillment of destiny (Morrison 52).

Not until the slave writers started writing subversive narratives of their experiences did the whites came across in literature as corrupt, inhuman and morally degraded. It is through such subversive writing that whites were also seen as an ethnic group, not the original race for which the coloured people constituted the Other.
The Gothic trope that is most pronounced in the play is the pathological condition of the protagonist which leads her to devastating consequences. Not literal demons, but metaphorical ones play an important role in the play. It is through tracing and analyzing the progression of Emma’s paranoid and delusional behaviour that we can see the catastrophic consequences of colourism and racism. Martha Gilman Bower analyses the play through the existential psychoanalytical theory of R.D. Laing. For Laing it is important how individuals perceive themselves from the eyes of the society. He also regarded fragmentation of the individual as a symptom of fragmentation of the modern society. Bower regards Color Struck as a play where the protagonist can be called a schizophrenic personality due to “an insecure, inferior vision of self and [one who makes] an attempt at creating “a false self system” (Laing’s term) and the futility accompanying this” (Bower 5). Emmaline, the female protagonist of the play is a young black woman. The Gothic, particularly the female Gothic is concerned with the practices of society that enslaves a woman and entombs her either physically or mentally. The first scene of the play depicts how in spite of the joyous ambience and the fun and frolic in which other people are engaged around her, Emma is constantly worried and anxious. Her anxieties and fears are based on her feelings of despondency and inferiority due to her skin colour, which is black and not brown like many other girls her lover John flirts with. However, her despair is transformed into an obsession over her own dark complexion, her boyfriend’s lighter skin tone and the light toned girls around her. Her misery is aggravated by the fact that all the men sitting in the Jim Crow car (including her boyfriend) flirt with a mulatto girl Effie. Patterson opines that in the South and within the black community

[Lighter skin colour not only signified beauty but also often marked one of a higher class. The ambivalence blacks felt about colour had its roots in centuries of racism and miscegenation, and found its way into the social relations between men and women and the social structure as a whole (Patterson 111).]

This flirting makes Emma fearsome, over-possessive and sulky, unable to enjoy any jovial moments with her lover. This situation or the anxieties that plague Emma’s mind are a result of dominant cultural ideology that makes her plunge into depths of obsession over skin colour. Luce Irigaray analyses the Freudian concept of “lack” with respect to the existence of a black woman and asserts that as a woman is
regarded as a ‘not-male’, with the implication of castration implicit in this definition of a female. Similarly, a black can be seen as ‘not-white’ with the implication of negativity aligned with the black identity. Irigaray mentions that Freud used the imagery of light and dark to explain woman, who, he thought, was mysterious in her essential nature. For Freud, the woman is a “Dark Continent, something forbidden” (qtd. in Bower 7). This also throws light on the notion that if various scholars and thinkers associate a white woman with darkness, what can be said of a black female. Secluded in her fears and threatened existence, Emma’s troubles are a reflection of the way the society has treated her till now, making her black complexion the center of her existence. Her life is determined not by her complexion, but by the values associated with it. As Mary Madden opines the text explores “the means by which black women’s identities and choices are restricted and controlled through the internalization and self policing of unachievable standards of beauty and behavior” (Madden 588). Emma’s internalization of these ideas makes horrifying hatred a part of her daily life. This is the dreadful impact of the white gaze on the Black community. This fear plays a key role in isolating Emma in her misery. Alice Walker in In The Search of Our Mother’s Garden, casts light on the insensitive preferential treatment and the effect that it is prone to cast on a human being, specially a woman, and the black people as a whole.

What a black women would be interested in, I think is a consciously heightened awareness on the part of light black women that they are capable, often quite consciously, of inflicting pain upon them; and that unless the question of Colorism- in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race proper same-race people based solely on their color—is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black “sisterhoods” we cannot, as a people, progress. For colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us (290-291).

It is imperative to note here how at the very beginning of the play Emma and John are lauded for their dancing skills. This implies that Emma is an artist. The play traces out the devastation of Emma, a black female artist, who cannot survive in the world due to the ideology of colourism that wrecks havoc on her mental condition. We see that Emma is entrapped in her paranoid condition where she cannot look beyond a person’s skin colour and is perpetually worried about how it affects her in turn. Emma,
unlike Pecola Breedlove in The Bluest Eye, does not idolize any white (or mulatta in her case), but her hatred towards women of lighter complexion is born of her own desire for it.

Emma cannot find a place for herself in the dominant culture and therefore participates in the process of destroying herself to find a place in this culture. Because she herself is not brown or yellow, she is forever afraid of losing John’s love and affection. She is more insecure because the practice of colourism has greater repercussions on her as a woman. Her insecurities and anxieties are not unfounded as many “empirical research on the nature of gendered colourism unveils that darker-skinned black women are at a particular disadvantage in the areas of beauty, male-selection and, self-esteem” (Wilder 26). John however, is not too pleased with this behavior of hers and her possessiveness annoys him. John’s very first dialogue in the play reveals Emma’s jealous nature that is still in the nascent stage. John explains that they got late to catch the car for the station because of Emma’s plaint, “It was Emmaline nearly made us get left. She says I wuz smiling at Effie on the street car and she had to get off and wait for another one” (CS 37). Emma, reacting to this accusation “turns furiously upon him” and is very certain of John’s favorable attitude towards Effie who is a mulatto, unlike her. While everyone around the couple enjoy and think they would certainly win the cakewalk competition, the seeds of destruction are already sown between them. Emma accuses John of smiling at every “yaller face”. John’s affection wins Emma for some time but she reveals that “jealous love is the only kind I got…Just for myself alone is the way I know how to love” (CS 93), a statement which gets proved in the next few hours. Bower explicates that this also hints towards Emma’s narcissism i.e., a grave problem of being unable to love anyone else except herself. Her paranoia and obsession is a developed form of this narcissism. She hates John and Effie for their complexion, but also desires the same. Bower cites Kristeva and puts Emma in the category of an auto-erotic, who loves himself and “discovers objects, but they are objects of hatred...threatening him with decomposition or petrification” (qtd. in Bower 44). Emma’s insecurities persist even after John’s reassurances

JOHN. Ah keep on tellin’ you Ah don’t love nobody but you. Ah knows heaps uh half- white girls Ah could git ef Ah wanted to. But (He squeezes her hand again) Ah jus’ wants you! You know what they say! De darker de berry, de sweeter de taste! (CS 41)
Trying to assuage her fears, his endeavours soon fall flat on the face as he takes a piece of pie offered by Effie, whom Emma calls “dat punkin-colored old gal”. John insists that he did this only to appear polite to Effie, but Emma paranoia soon begins to take center stage. Repeatedly talking ill of Effie, their lunch together is decidedly spoilt due to Emma’s jealous words and actions. For all the limelight that John and Emma bag as a couple for being the best cakewalking couple, Emma is increasingly mistrustful of John and suggests withdrawal from the dance as “all them girls is going to [be] pulling and hauling” on him. After being patient for long John is now certainly annoyed at Emma’s suspiciousness and chooses to participate with or without her. Classon opines, “Hurston creates an atmosphere in which, in the midst of a bright and joyful space, a cloud of darkness encompasses the two of them” (Classon). In her irritation and loathing towards the mulattoes, specifically Effie, we see where lies the root of her problem. The inequality that persists in the dealings of the American society where light-skinned women get more opportunities personally and professionally is the cause that stirs Emma’s jealousy and subsequent paranoia. This anger, rage and frustration of Emma’s gets an outlet in the form of being biased herself. The discrimination that makes her the target, takes a toll on her mental health. It finds a vent in directing the same discrimination towards others. In a short dialogue as she mentions her disgust of mulattos who get everything what they want, we know that she hates “them yaller wrenches”. As David Krasner holds, “Emma’s inferiority complex creates a twin condition, one that both internalizes a self-depreciating identity and externalizes it by focusing on the color prejudice of others”(Krasner). This is why Wilder appropriately regards the practice of colourism as “superficial, divisive and destructive mindset”(qtd. in Wilder 14), an instance of which we see in Color Struck. The play can be seen as a reflection of this idea as the practice of colourism is both the cause and its own result.

Violence and trauma experienced by the Other constitute a significant part of Gothic studies. Since early Gothic fiction damsels in distress have been in the center of Gothic and female Gothic narratives. Emma’s existence in Color Struck is that of a victim, as she suffers with what Pierre Bourdieu regards as symbolic violence. As opposed to physical violence, soft violence is exerted through “symbolic means of communication and cognition”(qtd. in Quema 116). Such violence, though invisible to the victim, casts a significant shadow on the mind so as to leave the scars not on the body but on the mind. Here the agents who commit this act of symbolic violence on Emma are the African-American community (directly) and the whites (indirectly).
Failing to give any sense of hope or chance, the black community comes across as largely lacking in the ethos of community building. Consequently, Hurston shows how the dissensions within the black community itself threaten an individual sense of being and living. Wilder in her study cites a speech by a British slave-owner of the nineteenth century who conveyed that for the slave system to continue and flourish, it was essential to create boundaries and estrangement in the black community. In his speech that now seems prophetic, he held that “pitting the light-skinned slaves against the dark-skinned ones (and vice versa) would generate envy and resentment for generation” (qtd. in Wilder 14). This symbolic violence extended from the period of slavery to many decades after its abolition. Emma’s pathologized behaviour is a result of this symbolized violence towards the black community. She represents all those black women who are victimized for their dark skin colour. Fleetwood compares Emma’s situation with that of Alma’s in Dael Orlandersmith’s Yellowman (2002). Orlandersmith’s play also deals with the problems of colourism, but as Fleetwood notices, Alma has the capability to hope for future. On the contrary, in Color Struck, Emma’s affliction changes from better to worse. Her bondage to her thoughts of being without any hope, brings her intense abhorrence for the light-skinned out very openly in front of the reader,

"EMMA. Oh, them half whites, they gets everything, they gets every- thing everybody else wants! The men, the jobs—everything! The whole world is got a sign on it. Wanted: Light colored. Us blacks was made for cobble stones (She muffles a cry and sinks limp upon the seat). (CS 44)"

Emma’s mental make-up is much similar to the female protagonists in the fiction of another southern Gothic writer, Joyce Carol Oates. Goodman studies Oates’s fiction to suggest that many female protagonists in her works are characterized by bitterness towards existence in the world that in turn is hostile to their needs. Also, the psychological malaise that characterizes Emma is also found in Oates’ female characters where they border on suicidal or psychotic. Though Emma is not suicidal, yet there exists in her a tendency of being reluctant to see the world as it really is, rather than mold things to suit her own viewpoint and thus increase her anxieties and fears.

Morbidity and spectrality are Gothic’s major concerns and also find a place in this play. As Reuber opines “[m]ournful reflections on the brevity of life, death, and of the sepulchral, a melancholic atmosphere...were initial characteristics of graveyard poetry, later of developing Gothic fiction” (Reuber 21). As Terry Castle also regards,
the living may be dead and may be the living are haunted by the dead. Thus, death that makes the human life terminate is the cause of much dread in Gothic fiction. With relation to life of a slave, Charles Chestnutt in a letter addressed to him by a black woman described the life of a Southern slave as a “a living death” (qtd. in Ianovici 36). Out of the myriad anxieties that afflict life and the characters in a Gothic text is death and its after-effects, in case the dead person becomes a ghost. Emma’s daughter – nearly white - is a living specter that hovers as an act of sexual union between people of mixed races. Emma is not married, therefore, Lou Lillian is a testimony to either a forced sexual encounter or an illegal sexual union. This is because forced unions with black women were common and a marriage between the two races was declared illegal by contemporary laws. Lou Lillian’s ghost-like presence that hovers during the last scene of the play is a constant reminder to the sexual depravity that so characterized the South – both antebellum and postbellum. The paranoia that earlier harmed only her own life now ends up taking her daughter’s life. Emma’s paranoia and delusional behaviour has progressed in leaps and bounds to come to a stage where her pathologic behaviour costs her Lou Lillian’s life. Emma cannot trust a middle-aged John with her white daughter. Emma refuses to come out of her mental entrapment and instead of going to the doctor she comes back to accuse John of being lustful towards her light-skinned daughter. Here she shuts all doors of any hopefulness or any positivity to enter her life as she is ensnared in her color-bias. John, obviously disgusted by such an allegation leaves Emma with an ailing daughter who dies soon afterwards. Death and life-in-death situation characterizes the entire play as the play very powerfully asserts the oppressive existence of the South. As Carol Boyce Davies asserts, any opportunity of “migration, mobility, movement, departure, return, re-departure and transformation” (47), is denied to Emma due to her physical and mental entrapment. Due to the practice of colourism, her own status in the power hierarchy so creeps into her mind that she borders on being a delusional person. Before leaving to see the doctor, she “securely tucks the girl in securely”, “leaving the door wide open”, revealing not to John but to the reader that she is worried and anxious of leaving her nearly white daughter with John. As John tries to put wet handkerchief to Lou Lillian’s forehead, Emma rushes in and misconstrues John’s actions in the over suspicious fashion that so characterizes her now. She is “full of fury” and “strikes him” in the manner of a delusional paranoid person and accuses him of molestation, “Let me go so I can kill you. Come sneaking in here like a pole cat!” (CS 50). In her threat to kill an innocent John, we see the trajectory complete as a case of paranoia as Emma is reduced to a deranged person full of undue suspicions,
doubts and insecurities that take hold of her completely. Laing explicates that if a person represses the expression of hatred, he is not psychotic, but if an act/threat of persecution accompanies the behaviour of a paranoid individual, she is a patient of psychosis. Bower opines that John’s light complexion

is the trigger that compels her to wipe out the enemy within, her fear of being taken over – an inner self that must not be exposed. Besides, she is not capable of love for an “other.” She even lets her daughter die when she deliberately delays fetching the doctor – probably because the daughter is a mulatto. Caught in the autoerotic state of narcissism, Emma must find a way out, so she accuses John of harming her daughter (Bower 43).

With the death of her child any chance of Emma being redeemed of a dreadful situation is also negated. The stage directions focus on this blighted existence that Emma is destined to live forever, denying herself any chance of acquiring either her lost lover or her dead child. For Krasner, Emma is seen as belonging to Said’s description of the "perilous territory of not-belonging," a territory where "people are banished " (qtd. in Krasner), as she is alienated from both the black and the white worlds. Emma

because of her dark skin, she remains an outcast in both the black and white worlds; even "home" becomes unsatisfying. Emma's darker hue and the social conditions that are imposed on "blackness" make her subject to exclusion both externally and internally. (Krasner)

Fragmented in her association with the world, not being able to belong anywhere, and hence, not deriving a sense of identity from anywhere, Emma is primarily a victim of dislocation and an exiled existence. This alienation of the black female from her domestic space is what white culture connived to do through formulation of ideology that branded the white woman as pure and the black woman as promiscuous. If there was no husband who could torment her like Delia’s in “Sweat”, Emma inflicted the torture upon herself through internalizing the way in which the white culture sees her. She conceives of herself as the whites and the blacks (also with internalization of white ideology) of her own race do, and herein lies the root cause of her horrendous existence. The play is indeed noteworthy in its ability to comment upon the destructive effects of white ideology without bringing any white character in the play. The cakewalk dance that occupies the center stage for quite some time in the play is also a comment on this dance, through which the white supremacists presented the
black as a caricature that was always laughing and dancing. This obliterated the horrifying experiences undergone by the blacks of the antebellum and the postbellum South. The “self-annihilation” (Bower 47) that Emma brings upon her is indeed horrendous in its immensity and depravity.

Michelle Masse argues how the Gothic is able to unveil the “cultural amnesia” which is able to shield and cover the traumatic experiences women undergo as they try to assert their subjectivity. Trauma writings, as David Punter claims, occupies a substantial space in Gothic works. For Masse, “Gothic horror...makes visible the terror that is used to make women into positions of subservience and powerlessness” (Martin and Savoy 166). It was against rigid categorization and dictatorial imposition of colour hierarchies and their destructive effects specifically on black women, that Hurston sought to draw attention through her play. Diana Miles in her book length study on Hurston sees her as a major participant in trauma writings. This is because most of the female characters in her works provide testimony to the violence – whether physical or mental – meted out to them. Rendering a female character struck with the practice of colourism is in line with Masse’s statement that “Gothic is the narrative of suffering women”(qtd. in Renee 21). Hurston depicted how the poor, black woman is marginalized in the society not only by the whites but also by the blacks and is traumatized for life. This segregation challenges one’s sanity of mind and has the capability to mar one’s (specially a black woman’s) existence with acute insecurity, anxiety and dejection, which deny any hope for the future. The Gothic’s concern with the Other, which has a corrupting effect on the self, is a primary one. In this context Hurston shows how first the white community is able to enslave the blacks, and then able to estrange them from each other to consolidate their power. Deborah King in her *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness* (1989) explicates the effect various controlling ideologies have on African-Americans, specially women, racism, sexism, and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems. An interactive model, which I have termed multiple jeopardy, better captures the processes. The modifier ‘multiple’ refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism (qtd. in Wilder 68).
The result of such treatment is silence, oppression and obliteration of a black woman from the social milieu. She is denied an independent existence of her own, which history should not ignore and trample over. An existence denied becomes a source of haunting and this is precisely that Black writers of the Gothic seek to convey.

The Gothic often subverts the power structures by not attacking them directly. William Patrick Day explicates that in such a manner power is exercised by “turning the tools of power against itself” (Martin and Savoy 179). Hurston shows her engagement with the fearful effect that the internalization of white ideologies has among the blacks. Through their faulty notions and politically driven motives, the whites were able to create an Othered class within the black community itself. As a severe repercussion of this practice, those few African-Americans who could rise in power and position due to their lighter skin colour “viewed the African-American masses with the same contempt expressed by the European-American population” (qtd, in Wilder 21). The manner in which the existence of a Black is objectified and reduced to the state of a ‘not-subject’ is one of the concerns that African-American Gothic seeks to address. Colourism as shown by Hurston in her play is a reductive practice that categorizes people as white or blacks through tests such as paper bag tests, pencil, ruler and door test. At the center of such tests is reduction of black bodies to commodities to be measured and labeled by the dominant discourse. Such criteria reflect the anxieties and fears of the white community, as the basis of such tests were practices such as ‘passing’. It was an act of horror for the whites if any black could ‘pass’ as a white and enjoy privileges instead of punishments. Edwards mentions that from Charles Brockden Brown to Thomas Nixon, Gothic writers were engaged in writing about how issues of colour and passing were a source of obsession for America as it implied a collapse of racial boundaries In many texts, this Gothic secret of mixed racial identity was the repressed past that threatened to the come to the fore. This secret of a miscegenated identity in such texts continuously threatened the protagonist as it was a repressed truth and the power to change lives, once it came to light. Edwards quotes Juda Bennett who says that “passing holds a “haunting and insistent” presence in American literature that is often characterized as a “twoness,” a “veil” or a “double consciousness,” thus reviving the trope of the Gothic double” (qtd. in Edwards xxix). Hence, for the whites it was necessary to mark a black from a white, even if the person contained one-drop of black blood. To save their race from its own
sinful acts, the whites objectified the blacks by creating various divisions within them such as mulatto, quadroon, octaroon etc. This creation of classifications served the interests of the whites but also ruptured black solidarity as the lighter blacks were privileged over the darker ones. The white ideology strategically fractured the Black community also by giving the lighter blacks a place in their houses while the dark ones were the field hands. As a result, there was an internalization of the fact among the Black community that the light Blacks were always favoured over the dark ones. Bell hooks explicates that the whites establish their supremacy through dissemination of such discourse which shapes and directs the way black people see themselves and the whites.

It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that “knowledge,” not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm (qtd. in Huntt 556).

It is subjugation to this knowledge that Emma displays pathological behavior that threatens her sanity and proves self-annihilating. Emma displays an interiorization of those values which see her as an outsider to the dominant cultural process and hampers her sanity of mind.

The concept of abject in any Gothic narrative highlights the negative value that an abject person/value/thing comes to represent. This abjection can be the consequence of various reasons such as race, religion, sexual orientation, material status- largely anything that threatens the dominant culture. Bower draws on Foucault’s idea of madness and the appalling treatment meted out to the Black race. She cites Foucault who claims that the blacks were already abject due to their skin colour and like mad people they were considered a canker to the white race. This makes Emma triply abject in the crowd as a black, as a woman and as a person suffering from mental illness. Emma’s strong bouts of paranoid behaviour make her alienated in the crowd. She is an artist who is isolated in her ordeals. Here also we see the basic anxieties reflected in female Gothic works. Hurston also seems to imply that it is difficult for a black female artist to survive in a society. The social conditions make sure that no black woman is able to live a constructive life that divorces them from their enslaved status – whether mental or physical. Emma’s isolation, alienation and increasingly paranoid behavior in the midst of her own race cast her as an abject entity in the
whole crowd. She is a victim of the cultural processes that lead to her obsessive and paranoid behaviour and the repercussion of this paranoia is her solitary position in the face of all the joy and gaiety around. Fleetwood explicates

The dark black woman, because of the inescapability of her body as excess in the visual sphere, is ironically rendered invisible as a subject, and yet hypervisible as abject. (Fleetwood 90)

This is in keeping with Judith Butler’s concept of abject in social terms that the abject inhabits the zone that is unlivable and inhabitable. By such behaviour and exclusion from the community rituals, Emma actually conforms to those forces of culture that reduce a female being to nothing. Such population cannot be regarded as subject but only abject. Emma is so entombed in her mindset that no optimism is able to permeate her thoughts. It is only the emotions of jealousy, fragmentation and intense anxiety that cripple her consciousness. Emma is victimized due to the process of colourism but the way her mind processes revenge is through being as hateful towards the light-skinned people, as she herself is hated for it. In making Emma a figure of such abjection, Hurston actually represents the plight of those who are sensitive and are caught in the mire of racism and colourism all across the nation. Emma is unable to value herself because she has been taught by the society not to do so. This abject state in which Emma is relegated to is due to her “troubling geographical and discursive spatiality that pathologizes the South as a site where blacks are the perpetrators and victims of a system of colourism divorces from whites” (Fleetwood 95). Hence, not only the whites but also the blacks fail to provide and nourish Emma with a sense of community and intra-racial fraternity. Wilder suggests how the labeling of dark-skinned girls as subordinates since slavery “highlights the nature of colorism as a vehicle for the reproduction of hegemonic racism and sexism against black women” (Wilder 95). This is related to another notion that adds Gothicism to the play i.e., Emma’s depersonalization. The feeling of alienation, fragmentation and depersonalization - all rob an individual of his/her existence. R.D. Laing names such behaviour as ‘petrification’ where an individual is in constant fear of being depersonalized. Before others make an attempt to do so, such an individual herself puts herself into that category so that “to turn oneself into stone becomes a way of not being turned into a stone by someone else”(Goodman). The condition where a human being is relegated to being invisible to her skin colour, is a mark of severe oppression that has the potency to pathologize the existence.
The Gothic is intimately related to issues of power as one who has power is always the subject and the powerless is the object. While early Gothic works focused on the anxieties of the powerful and dominant, later Gothic works chose to dwell on the fears of those under subjugation. The play under study here highlights how the oppressive relationship between the black and the whites work more through internal oppression rather than external discipline. Foucault explains that the subjugated lets the power bearer “play spontaneously upon himself: he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (qtd. in Martin and Savoy 171). Such is the situation of Emma where she lets white ideologies that corrupt black existence, to rule over her. In this process she becomes an accomplice in her own destruction. Emma’s plight in the next scene worsens as her pathologized condition is now spread outside her as well. Her despondency has extended to the ambience around her. The setting conveys a sense of Emma being entombed, literally in her abject sordid surroundings and metaphorically in her mental slavishness to her despondency, isolation, paranoia and schizophrenic tendencies of thinking herself as a victim all the time. Living amidst poverty, squalor and overall a very depressive ambience, Emma is still not divorced from her paranoid condition. Emma’s present situation reveals her inability to make sense of situation and to see things in the right perspective. An ironical fact is that the whiteness hated by Emma in other women, comes to haunt her own home in the form of her nearly white daughter. Disease and degeneracy, so characteristic of the rural South, pervade the little shack in which Emma lives. John moved to the North for some time but Emma lived in depravity ever since. The gaiety that was contradictory to Emma’s fate earlier is now no more present as depressiveness and darkness characterize both the outer as well as the inner condition of Emma’s. Her misery seems to engulf her in its passivity, feeding only obsession and paranoia in her. Emma’s happiness upon seeing John after decades seems to betray the audience into thinking that may be Emma’s paranoia must have subsided. As John talks of taking her to the South, she appears glad and forthcoming. John notices that Lou Lillian, Emma’s daughter needs a doctor and asks Emma to fetch one. The play however, being Gothic, displays an intimate relationship with an existence that is not fulfilling but troubled.

The drama sheds light on and displays the ugliness and fears that lurks beneath the pastoral existence of the American South. The Gothic mode aids in bringing the fictional account to display reality in a more forceful fashion. The play explores the question of the identity of black women that is negated in every realm of existence. Hurston situates her works in her contemporary settings and not some different
temporal dimension to assert the notion that the horror of African-American existence is here and now. For her the present is fraught with intense dread and the future can be the same unless the American nation faces its demons of a terrible past. The text also evinces the fact that “[s]cenes of violence, humiliation, and dehumanization are blocked out by both individuals and communities, but they cannot thereby be erased” (Byerman 27). As Hurston displays, such scenes are most aptly conveyed through the Gothic.

Notes

1. From Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “Dreamland”.